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O.22,'15 M.A.S.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

"LEAVE the East? My dear fellow, I wouldn't think of it, not even for St. James's! And as for Leipsic——"

"You'd get double the salary, and be another rung up the diplomacy ladder. I can't see——"

The other man interrupted, with a negligent shrug. "One couldn't expect that you would. You haven't been out here long enough. But if you stay, you'll understand. I have lived in Hong-kong for five years —which is only another way of saying that I'll never live anywhere else; at least, nowhere out of the Orient. Where would be the sense? I have my house, comfortable enough"—he looked about the darkened veranda, littered with bamboo chairs and cool linen cushions in attractive confusion;—"my Chinese servants, the best in the world; a few hours' work a day, and that I leave to my secretary. Then there are the people—the European colony. Hong-kong isn't exactly an F.F.V. milieu; the black sheep of civilization has made it his Mecca for some time, but he's made it interesting as well. A one-nationality set would bore me into a fit of nerves now. So would permanent people. Here every one is blessedly transient. You know that if you have a row with B to-night, he is

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liable to be recalled to-morrow, and you need never see him this side of Valhalla; or if you are indiscreet and get into a scandal with Mrs. A, she and A take a run to Manila for a week or two. I always make it my rule to let the other side evade the complication; that is why I am a fixture."

"But the cursed climate, Wayne! However do you stand it?"

"It never occurs to me, except when some stranger like yourself comes out. There is always fresh linen and claret-cup to help out, and I never go anywhere until after seven, except to the cricket grounds or the club for tea. Anything I want Len gets—he even goes to the bank for me, and I think that teller down there would give Len every cent of my balance if the old weasel asked for it. I tell you, Jack, you Occidentals don't know how to live, else you wouldn't urge my throwing up all this for that damned old German town—and more money."

John Armistead stood up and looked distrustingly at his calm-faced friend. It was the first time in his life that he had heard his strenuous goddess of the dollar discounted—excepting for an occasional smooth tap from the pulpit, and he could scarcely credit the blasphemer's sincerity. At Yale, he remembered distinctly, Wayne had joined as loudly as any one in the universal American chorus: "out for money" was the frankly announced post-graduate intention of all the '98 class-men—but it seemed that the Service had fuddled his motives. In college the two room-mates had shared everything, including their allowance and a few rather vague ideals; but Armistead found himself brought suddenly against the inexplicable when this old chum tranquilly snapped his fingers at what the financier called a "raise"—and a flattering one at

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that—and chose to stay on in the obscurity and fiendish heat of Southern China.

"What'd you ever go into it for?" asked Armistead suddenly.

"The Consular, you mean? Oh, it was easy, and interesting, and took me away from Alabama. I'd grown sick of the Southern gentleman rôle, you know."

"Um-m!" Armistead did know; he recollected having heard that Randal Wayne had "grown sick" quite actively; that the young man's guardian-uncle had been glad to use every jot of his influence to bundle him out of the country, by way of the Consular Service. That was nine years ago, and for five Wayne had been consul at Hong-kong. "You went to Japan first, didn't you?"

"Yes—led a galley-slave's life for eighteen months. Lord! How I hated it!" His laugh rang out pleasantly musical, as he refilled the tall iced glass at his side. "Then there was an opening in Canton, vice-consul had died or something, and Uncle Nick got me in—fine thing this having an uncle in the Cabinet. It saves one all sorts of waiting. I came here in just about a third of the time it generally takes a man to make a consulship. Only the dear old boy can't realize that it's here I want to stay."

"I suppose he is ambitious," put in Armistead, dryly emphasizing the pronoun.

The consul stirred his ice reflectively. "I suppose he is," he said. "Most people in the States are, aren't they?"

"If they aren't they ought to be," returned the other, irritated at the failure of his irony. "You take a country like America, the greatest Republic on earth, with every sort of resource for commercial supremacy, and a generous hand out for every man who has the

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brains to find it: it's an atmosphere to breed ambition!" He stared contemptuously across the hill at a group of coolies sleeping in the shade of a great tea-house, at the nodding figure of Wan-Ho, Wayne's second Boy, who was mechanically pulling the punkah rope in an effort to manufacture some breeze out of the still hot air; and finally at the long, languid grace of his host's faintly-tanned fingers, carelessly dropping biscuit to his dog.

It was a setting against which John Armistead, brisk, shrewd, and simple, was patently incongruous. He disdained it, but at the same time it made him uncomfortable. And yet he thought the subtlety of the Orient, the much-bewritten mystery of eastern people "all bosh." Nor is that idea uncommon with the kindly, direct American who has made money faster than he has mastered the lore of character.

"Your Uncle has done wonderful things with his department," went on the magnate abruptly. "The country owes something to Nicholas Wayne—more than a little bit. They tell me that with the President his word has more weight than anybody's; the strongest men in the Senate don't cut any ice when the Secretary of State's around."

"So my sister writes," said Wayne. "In the same letter in which she told me of your coming she said that people were even mentioning Uncle Nick as a presidential candidate. But I expect that is only around Mobile. When a prophet is popular, you know, his own country seldom fails to lose its head over him. Didn't I read, by the way, that Roger Maddox came over on your boat?"

"Yes; but he stopped over a steamer, in Yokohama. He's coming on next week. Nice fellow—though Lil and Zona didn't seem to cotton to him much."

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"Zona——?"

"I forgot to tell you my wife's cousin came over with us—a half-cousin, that is. Her father died, a while back, and Lil asked her if she wouldn't come along on this trip. Not much doing for a girl in mourning, you see, and Lil's awfully fond of Zona. Pretty girl, lots of money, and all that—a little strong-minded, perhaps, but I guess a good husband will cure her of that all right."

Randal Wayne smothered the amused smile which threatened his courtesy. He had almost forgotten the threadbare panacea for feminine eccentricity.

"Don't you think that Mrs. Armistead and Miss——"

"Raimund—Zona Raimund's her name."

"And Miss Raimund, would come to lunch with us here? You said they were hunting up some people, but one of the servants could find them. No doubt I know their friends—if you remember the name."

"That's mighty clever of you, Wayne, and I think the ladies would like it immensely. It was Mrs. Soper they were to look up. English chaplain's wife, I believe."

"Exactly. Mrs. Soper is my one co-fanatic over the East—though even she has lapses, when it comes to what she calls my ingrowth here." He clapped his hands and the impassive Len appeared, noiselessly—too noiselessly, Armistead thought. "Go top-side Missee Soper, catchee two piecee Melican lady come this side tiffin, savvy?"

Len nodded and disappeared.

"He'll find 'em," said Wayne, dropping back into his chair. "All we have to do is to wait. You say Maddox is coming on here next week?"

"Yes." Armistead was still puzzling over the jargon which to Len was apparently quite intelligible. "Yes, he's coming on around, going to do Manila and

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then run up through India for a while. Says he wants to get so far away from Chicago that he'll forget it's on the map. I feel sorry for Maddox, and that's the truth. The party machine beat him out so completely, and so unexpectedly; if it hadn't been spectacularly sudden, I don't believe the Socialists would have stood for it; they're all-fired strong in Chicago, since that meat book came out—that novel about the stockyards and slaughter houses, you know. And Roger was very popular with them. But he's done for himself by throwing up the sponge and coming off here. My, but the papers roasted him! Called him all sorts of a coward. He isn't, though—not one bit of it—he just had a bad case of political biliousness, and lit out for a change of diet."

"But your ladies don't like him?" persisted Wayne, adopting with unconscious tact the singular title under which Armistead lumped his womenfolk.

"Oh, well, I guess they like him well enough, only Zona's read all that stuff about the beaten dog slinking off abroad, and Lil says he is uncomfrrtably big, no matter where you put him." It is thus that the guileless lay bare the salient points of character, that who listeth may analyze.

And Randal Wayne was something of an analyst. For at least five years he had given his indolent attention to nothing else but points of view, using even his desires as gimlets to bore to the inner source. Just now his mental vision of the two women would have startled his new-old friend by its correctness—even to the details.

"Doubtless Chicago agreed with Mrs. Armistead's idea," was all he said. "The latter-day minuteness of American politics calls for delicate handling of its intricacies, I imagine."

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"You imagine! There you go again—don't you know anything about America? Don't you care anything about it any more? Why, you haven't been home in nine years, and Mrs. Herrington told me they had fairly grovelled to you to come. What's got into you, Randy?"

The tall consul rolled a cigarette with suggestively deft fingers. It was a long time since he had talked with any one so blunt—and so honest—as to throw down his whole hand without fear of the back strike. Wayne rather liked it. It added to his collection of individualities.

"Frankly, old chap, I'm not interested in indiscriminate America." He paused long enough to be surprised at his own phenomenal down-rightness. "It will shock your patriotism violently, but I care far more who wins in the club tennis than in the Presidential election, and I'm more anxious about my cook's infallibility than about the Speaker's. Why not? After all, I'm an expatriate, you see"—lightening the declartion with the old strangely winning smile Armistead remembered—"a voluntary one, but still—without a country."

"You're paid to serve the country, just the same!" blurted out the Westerner. It was a type of which he knew nothing; therefore he could not hope to make an impression.

"Quite true." Wayne smiled again. "And I squander the pay on riotous living, while somebody else serves for me—the secretary, as a rule. He is an American too; I mean energetic, which saves me a great deal of bother. However, Jack, I'm not altogether a failure as a pro-president—I give dinners on Thanksgiving Day, and the Fourth of July, then on February 22 there's always a masquerade here; and when I have

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to I make a patriotic speech—sometimes I make a really excellent patriotic speech. Of course, I support all the clubs and the English Church. They think in Hong-kong that I help the eagle scream, even though I don't know the first thing about the Tariff Bill."

"Oh, I don't doubt that outwardly you're all right," fumed Armistead, beginning to pace up and down in magnificent defiance of the thermometer. "It's this darned Eastern lassitude that's gotten into your ideas that riles me. Aren't you enthusiastic about anything? Come now—women?"

His eyes narrowed searchingly, but Wayne looked back at him with a disarming humour. "They've been telling you the usual trans-Pacific fables about life in the Far East, I see. But I'm not even interested in women, except as comedy; and that other mania attributed to us has never compelled my recognition either. I can't keep on drinking after I've stopped being thirsty. All that stayed at home with my puppy-days."

"You need something to happen to you," said the man of millions. "Something to shake you out of your indifference. Good God! Think what you'll be at fifty!"

"American consul at Hong-kong, I hope," returned Mr. Wayne serenely.

And John Armistead gave up.

"Wonder if that boy of yours has found the girls," he began uneasily. "It's pretty hot for them to be out."

"Len will see that they have covered chairs, and Mrs. Soper lives quite near. Wan Ho!" He raised his voice. "Mebbe Len come hill-side, bring two piecee Melican ladee. You go see!"

The punkah stopped flapping, and Wan Ho's feet,

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another proof of Wayne's victorious content, paddled obediently to the front of the house.

"No can see, Excellency. Two piecee chair come downside, mebbee can do Melican ladee. Me no see Len."

"He's probably gone on to the joss," observed his master carelessly. "Tell Ping to send up tiffin. Never saw such a rabid Confucianist as that old weasel," turning to his guest—"Len, I mean. Every time I send him out he makes straight for the joss-house, and what he and the priest don't worm out of the gods, between them, isn't worth while. Ping told me Len spent half of his enormous wages—eight Mexican dollars a month!—buying rice paper for prayers. They have to write them down, you see—no talkee-talkee straight to Heaven like we're allowed. The Apostle of the Temple has to see them all, and approve. Think what would happen to a censor of prayer in the States! He'd be the biggest boss on earth."

"Here they come now!" Armistead was undeniably glad of it. He rather shrank from Randal's whimsical profanity—for Armistead dubbed all humour at the expense of either Church or State profanity. It was with even more than his usual enjoyment that he saw his wife; she was a person who never made one uncomfortable.

He looked at her with the almost pathetic delight of a child for its grandest toy, as she came across the veranda—tall and swaying, like a pale yet voluptuous orchid, in her clinging mauve gown.

The consul looked at her too; at first for the simple reason that no one could have helped it, and then because he felt, with one of his characteristic impulses, that she was going to mean something: what and how were to be the interesting uncertainties; and uncer-

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tainties were among the few things that Wayne welcomed with any enthusiasm. He stepped forward to meet Mrs. Armistead with a sort of checked swiftness—a combination which betrayed him to the shrinking shreds of soul itself, had any one been there with the capacity to note it. As it was, there were only a man and his wife—neither of whom could have been called cribbers out of the book of observation.

Yes, and there was a girl too—a girl at first hidden by the tall sweep of the other woman's beauty; but then coming up straight and self-possessed and hardly a girl after all, in spite of a certain undeniable immaturity.

"This is my wife's cousin, Miss Raimund," said Armistead. And Wayne and the girl shook hands. I often think how paradoxical it is that the most enduring antipathies as well as the warmest affections should be given birth in this conventionally cordial hand-shake!

"We were afraid of a real conspiracy until Mrs. Soper assured us that the mandate was from the Consulate," said Miss Raimund with a little laugh. "As it happened we could hardly get here at all. Lilith had bought so many things she didn't want, the chairs were loaded down."

"I thought I wanted them." Mrs. Armistead sank down among a soft pile of cushions as though she had found what she was really hunting for.

Armistead gave a huge wink at Wayne. "You see? That's where it goes—for things she thought she wanted! And I have to go up rivers and into plagues and among savages to get it for her!"

"What would you do if you didn't have to get it for somebody?" Zona Raimund put the question with a frank amusement that drew Wayne's eyes away from Lilith for the moment.

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"Go into the Consular, wouldn't you, Jack?" smiled his friend. "He was running over its advantages with me, just before you came."

"I am sure it must be a very agreeable life——" Lilith had begun to take off her hat; but her hands paused, arrested simultaneously with her eyes, which followed Randal Wayne's clean, finely-etched profile with involuntary pleasure.

"It is—if only there weren't any so-called promotion in it. I suppose it's impossible for a man—an American—to realize that there can be a person quite contented to stop. But here he sits!" The narrowing flicker of Wayne's lids took in the fact that there was another person present who had also been content to stop—he wondered if she reciprocated his sympathy.

"Oh, that's all very well, Randy," put in Armistead. "But the real reason you don't want Hamburg, or any other place, is because you know so darn well that you can have it! You're blasé"—Armistead pronounced it *blazy*—"that's all you are!"

"I see you understand me——" The consul smiled as he rose, slowly, and with an appealing grace that was at the same time virility in sum. "I'm glad you aren't a resident, Jack. You could make me unbearingly abashed, and I allow no one to do that except Wrinkles. He being under the table, I take it tiffin is announced. That's all the dinner-bell we ever have." And he led them out into the cool half-light of his dining-room.

It was a charming room—all subtle greens, with long bare stretches of wall and window, and soft hangings of pale yellow stuffs at the many doors. When Wayne saw Lilith in it, he was glad there were no other pictures. This pretty blonde Lilian of his imagination—captious and spoiled after the time-worn American

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fashion—had stepped out of her husband's misnomer and become a woman of conflicting maturity and ingenuousness. Wayne saw the extent of Armistead's knowledge of her every time he called her "Lil." The smart three letters seemed to curl themselves round each other and tickle their sides as they were pronounced; for even the alphabet has some sense of the incongruous. Husbands are different. What do long grey eyes which threaten green, and red-gold hair, and skin like rose-streaked ivory mean to husbands? Why, eyes and hair and skin; that's all! And anything for a convenient name to call them by. There are two modes of enjoying women, if you are a man: possession and restraint. And the mode you choose is never very far removed from your general philosophy of life. Wayne was informing himself of all this, and holding conversation with Miss Raimund in the margin.

"Jack tells me you crossed with our old friend Roger Maddox, and that you didn't like him." Wayne felt that directness was *the* ground of appeal to Lilith's relative. That was perhaps why Lilith interested him more.

"I know him very casually," returned Miss Raimund. "It was the brazenness of his running away from the crux which I cavilled at to Cousin John."

"Oh, I say, little girl, you're too hard on old Roger." Armistead was nothing if not loyal. "He was sick of the whole game, and he knew he couldn't gain anything by staying. I don't blame him a bit for cutting out."

"It must have been very unpleasant for him," seconded Lilith. "Except for his hands and feet, I think he is quite nice."

She looked involuntarily at her own hands, which were faultless, and Wayne, watching her, comprehended.

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"Roger always was a bit clumsy, but a good fellow and wonderfully well liked—though I never knew him so well myself. At Yale he was only a freshman when I graduated. And he can't be more than twenty-eight now. When he comes we must all have a little dinner together up on the Peak."

"The Peak?" Miss Raimund's eyes turned to the consul's for almost the first time.

"I forgot you were so newly arrived." Wayne was nothing if not subtle. "The Peak is that height of fog and mildew whither we make pilgrimages when the thermometer gets too unmanageable. I seldom go up, myself, except for a meal occasionally; but Hongkong in general is rather foolish over the place—it's a question between passive discomfort and active—up there one has to be continually fighting the damp and the dew—I prefer the passive myself."

"I remember now, Mrs. Soper said something about moving to the Peak to-morrow; she says she lives there during the hot weather. She wanted us to stop with her for a few days, but Jack has those trips to make, into the interior." Mrs. Armistead looked at her husband vaguely, without a hint of petulance, implying with no irritation, and without any great feeling, that she knew very little of the reasons for his movements. Wayne wondered idly how she had come to marry him. He concluded that she had been poor and grown tired of it.

"But surely you and Miss Raimund won't go with him," he protested. "I haven't heard where he's going—you see——" again with that magnetic vanishing smile—"we were still on 'me' when you came."

"Why shouldn't we go with him?" asked Zona, angry with her sudden impulse of fascination for his childlike-

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ness. Egoism, no matter how frank, had always been among her disgusts.

"Well, for one thing, it's the hottest season of all the year, and when you get up these rivers and into the cramped, crowded interior towns, you're apt to run against cholera and yellow fever and all sorts of things." Wayne spoke with assurance, though perhaps indefinitely. He had never been up a river.

"Of course, Jack could stand it all right, I suppose, though in his place I'd never go unless something awfully strenuous called; but you—why imagine yourself without trunks, without a tub, without even water half the time, sleeping in dirty little rooms, smaller than your pantry, and——" His shrug of finality narrowed down to Lilith, who smiled as she saw him detailing the mauve gown.

"Oh, of course they can't go," put in Armistead, in the affectionately settled tone of an indulgent but far-seeing parent. "I've got to run up the Yang-tse, you see, Wayne, and then to Tsun-hua and some of the southern towns, and it's no sort of an itinerary for a woman. They can stay here, or in Shanghai; and when I'm through, we'll go down to Canton for a day or two—I'll only be around here for about two months, and the main thing for the girls is to keep cool and not get sick."

"I should like to go with you," said Zona.

"Well, my dear, I can't take you. You'd be in the way, and sure to catch something. Wayne will introduce you here, and you'll have a good enough time, I daresay." He looked at Zona rather anxiously—she was not like "Lil," easy to satisfy with luxurious rooms and capable servants and long hours of solitude on a cool couch. John Armistead wished—not for the first time—that Lilith had not brought her.

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"Certainly." Wayne came to his rescue with prompt cordiality. "We will make you a convert to the Hong-kong hallucination in a week. And by the way, Jack, why don't you just make this place your hotel while you're here? It's primitive enough, you can see, but not so barn-like as the *Grand*, and then you can feel quite safe about the ladies while you are away. I hope"—again he looked at Lilith—"that you won't deny me this pleasure? It isn't often that I have the chance to play host to old friends."

"Now that's awfully kind of you, Randy." Armistead laid a large affectionate hand on Wayne's shoulder, before his wife could answer. "And I will feel lots happier about the girls if I know they're with you. When'll you be ready to move?" he asked them, being quite as instant to accept hospitality as he would have been to offer it.

"I am afraid we shall make you a great deal of trouble, Mr. Wayne." Lilith's sweet, trailing voice lingered over his name. "You see, there is my maid, and then——"

"If you bring a maid my servants will stay on for nothing," Wayne interrupted. "They'll imagine at least that the woman is doing all their work, in true Chinese humility."

Armistead chuckled. "Like to see anybody get anything out of that grand duchess—why, Wayne, she don't even speak a Christian language. You see what you're up against."

The consul held aside the yellow dragon silk for Lilith to pass under. As her skirts swept his feet he saw that her eyes matched the dragon's. "I'm not afraid," he said; "only more interested; a mute grand-duchess invading Ping's throne-room below-stairs! But"—his sudden concentration pushed all

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the inconsequentials to the background—"when will you come?" Lilith started to speak, but, as usual, Armistead unconsciously overruled her; and as usual Zona made no effort.

Was the triple attitude immutable? Wayne wondered.

"Well, I'm ready to pull out Sunday afternoon for Shanghai. The girls can come along or not, just as they like; but I'll be there only a day, and then go on up the river. In any case, we'd better send our stuff up here on Sunday. You won't want to take all those things to Shanghai, will you, Lil?"

"I think we will come up on Sunday," said Lilith, whose remarks had a curious non-relation to her husband's. "As Mr. Wayne says, it's too hot to go anywhere, and I shall be glad to have my things about me. So—if that will suit you?"—she looked up at him—"and Zona?"

"Certainly," said Zona, without interest.

And Randal Wayne saw them depart with the stimulating consciousness that a set of new sensations had come to prod his inertia.

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CHAPTER II

IN the most comfortable corner of her cousin's spacious, cool room, Lilith lay watching Zona. The girl's willingness, desire rather, herself to do what she could easily have got some one to do for her, was a continual and not unprovoking puzzle to her relative; and at the same time there was about Zona's quick, quiet movement a pleasing litheness which was bound to fascinate the other woman's sensitive eye. Her own room had been settled hours before. Agnes knew by experience just how her mistress arranged her possessions, so that each separate object and garment might be seen in its most alluring slide of colour. For not only to herself was Lilith gracious in the matter of setting—it was her *grande passion* to place advantageously. During the eight years since she had married John Armistead, the science had grown upon her, until now it was no longer a part of her conscious mentality; her clothes—even the gauzy Nile *negligée* which shaded the warmth of her hair into Zona's toneless gray divan—belonged to her as indissolubly as the needle belongs to the magnet. And the diploma to her perfect achievement lay in the fact that people could seldom repeat what she had worn. "I only know that she was the most exquisite creature I ever saw," Mrs. Soper told her husband; "I fell in love with her unconditionally."

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Which was exactly what every one else did—at least for a period. And Lilith Armistead was that singular nonentity—a person without an enemy. Before her marriage, when as Wayne had guessed, she lived in the comparative poverty of a small New Hampshire parsonage, she had been too unvaryingly simple with people to invite even jealousy of her loveliness. Perhaps she had always had an uncanny realization of the market value of herself—"herself" with Lilith meaning her wonderful hair and queer long eyes, that scarcely tinted skin and curved scarlet mouth—most appealing of all. She spoke but one language, and that the visible; but she spoke it without a phantom flaw, and there was no trouble in finding others equally conversant in it. More than one man had wanted to annex her before she finally was satisfied to belong to John Armistead (whom she met on a Sunday School picnic excursion to Nantucket); but Lilith had an excellent though unconscious sense of values, as long as they came under the tangible, and she held out until she got ample exchange.

With Armistead her ideals, after long years of starvation, received complete reward; and even her father, a mild unworldly soul, who had shrunk from the marriage as savouring of materialism, rejoiced to see "Lillie" so contented. The gentle minister had been, in the secret of his confession, relieved at his only child's leaving him. Always pliable, considerate, and making for his comfort, there was yet some evasive quality about her which disquieted him—a lack so subtle that he could not have given voice to it. But he laid their discrepancies—hers and his—at the door of his youthful marriage with Elena Tanguey, a New Orleans girl—a beauty too in an odd Spanish way, and a Catholic by instinct, as well as

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by birth. His wife's father had been at school with his father, and when the young man was asked to visit in the Southern city, his case of first love had run the gamut of folly, and resulted in marriage: hence Lilith's mother. People wondered then that he had not fancied Nanon, the more even-tempered half-sister (Zona's mother), who, though a few months older than he, was beautiful and charming and altogether more on the New England pattern. But men will love wrong, and ridiculously incompatible matches will be made as long as two headstrong sexes people the world. So Robert Marlowe and Elena Tanguey made what best they could of their blunder. Elena, coming of a long line of hot-headed Castilians, not a few of whom had shown traces of insanity, froze in her husband's New England home under the combined chill of climate and provincial distrust. But before her pathetically eager death she had spent ten ineradicable years with her child—the child whose extravagant beauty and slow swaying grace was a wonderful compensation to the woman who had failed in the biggest game. The old minister often thought of those years, when he came suddenly into contact with one of Lilith's incomprehensibilities; and he sighed sometimes over the duplicate defalcation of the two women—the dead and the living—who should have meant to him the most in life.

With the help of his own sister, and of Nanon Raimund—she too had ultimately married a Northerner—he attempted to "raise" Lilith in the orthodox New Hampshire way, even altering her heathenish name so that it conformed more nearly to the bylaws of Puritan nomenclature. But he was not, like John Armistead, without a sense of applicability, and in his heart he knew that the liquid pagan

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syllables chosen by her mother, matched his child's nature to the defiance of inane, insipid "Lillie." He had been shamefacedly glad of the necessity of acknowledging it in her marriage service; and on the rare occasions when he had seen her since then, he had as far as he could avoided calling her name. She was happy, and married to a "good man"; and the white-haired little minister returned to his books and his people with a breath of great relief, each time he came from visiting her.

Lilith herself was serenely unconscious of having failed her father's spirituality. With him as with her husband, she had followed the smooth line of least resistance, until she fitted its groove with what seemed an irrevocable exactness. In Nevada, and later in New York, she lived as irreproachably-accepting as she had in her father's village; the only difference lay in a certain crystallization of her standards, which, in turn, led to a settling of feature, although with regard to this also, Lilith was unconscious. She knew that with money—that is the right clothes and careful grooming—she was more beautiful than she had been before; and she knew that to be beautiful, and to have everything and every individual around her *de luxe* of its kind, was her paramount object in existing. But she had never said so, not even to herself—for it goes without asserting that she was not self-communicative. Few true Epicureans—and there are but few—have time for themselves. The pursuit of perfect things is absorbing, and never-ending. Only once in a long while the ego puts forward its claim, and then in the person of the most fastidious.

Lilith's ego was but just beginning to stir out of its fixed somnolence. In the few days since she had

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arrived in Hong-kong, and especially during that day since she had come within the actual walls that bounded it, the influence of awakening had whispered its advent. And—as though it feared to startle that prolonged sleep—even the whisper was slow, indolent, and full of the grace she had been born adoring. Lilith scarcely heard it, as yet; she was by habit so taken up with those inanimate whispers we have come to call surroundings.

"Do you like your room?" she asked her cousin kindly. Zona was pulling photographs out of a half-unpacked trunk. Lilith noticed without curiosity that she looked at one of them for a full half minute before she answered.

"Oh, well enough. It's rather an odd room for a man's house, don't you think? Yours is much more obvious." She glanced about with a sort of comprehensive inventory of the nun-gray walls, soft golden hangings and dull-cushioned chairs. It was an undeniable antithesis to the rose and white luxury of Lilith's apartment, but Zona decided that she was flattered at the consul's assignation. It would have exasperated her if he had put her in a corresponding blue and white bower; for none of her impatiences was more violent than impatience of the trite.

Zona, you see, was a college girl—still struggling under all the encumbrances of graduation. It was over a year since Bryn Mawr had given her once more to the world, still——

"I wish Cousin John would have taken me up river," she said, finding at last a place for the large picture she had been studying. "I do hate doing nothing."

"I fancy there is plenty to do here," Lilith suggested, stifling a yawn. "And Mr. Wayne says that

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it is frightfully hot in Tsun-hua, or wherever it is that Jack is going."

"And you think that he knows?" Zona might have saved her scorn, had she stopped to remember former attempts upon her cousin's understanding. "Why, he's never been to Foochow even—I asked Mrs. Soper!"

"That is very sensible of him," murmured Lilith. "I am sure I should never stir from this delightful house, if I were he."

"He reminds me of a mollusc—one with an extra hard shell." Zona sat down on the floor with a plump of belligerence. Then, as though she realized her bad manners: "It certainly was very civil of him to take us on his hands for such a long time, though of course he did it out of friendship for Cousin John. I can't think that he really wanted us."

"He and Jack were in college together," explained Lilith superfluously. "I suppose he is glad to introduce us. His sister told us that he hadn't been home since he came out here. What?" As Zona muttered something under her breath.

"Nothing." She was determined to conquer her ungraciousness.

"And in Mobile he was always exceedingly well-liked with people. You heard him say that he had visited at our grandfather's house."

The conclusive simplicity with which Lilith put forth this witness to Wayne's social blamelessness, accentuated their difference in grandmothers: Zona might have spent hours of elocution, weeks of careful practice, and yet she could never have pronounced that little phrase "our grandfather's house" with the unconscious pride of race that Lilith wove about it. To the girl reared in New York, under the hap-

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hazard direction of a literateur father—who was also an exacting invalid—ancestors meant nothing. But that they stood for such an integral factor in life to her part-Spanish cousin, was one of the few facts about Lilith that appealed to Zona's imagination. Lilith's lineage, her Church—on her marriage she had been at last confirmed a Catholic—her extreme physical exquisiteness, were to Zona the excuses of her being; since these things alone gave Mrs. Armistead atmosphere. "One can concede a great deal to insight," the graduate had written, in a 5,000 word essay. "But to psychic undevelopment——" and certainly Lilith was not psychic!

"Grandfather entertained almost all the time, didn't he?" Zona put the question with the insinuation of a child hinting for a story, but in order to seem to herself casual, she went on taking things out of her trunk.

"My mother said the house was never allowed to be without a guest. And at Carnival, when strangers came in such hordes to New Orleans, the maids' rooms were refitted and used, and they had to sleep with the other servants at the Quarter. Our grandfather boasted that there had never been an instance when he was not able to show courtesy to one more visitor."

"And the balls——?" Zona suggested with the delicate greed of one familiar with her Grimm's.

"The balls"—Lilith's voice warmed—"were enchanting—they were famous from Saint Augustine to Monterey. For days before, people were arriving, and the cooks were baking until late at night, and the little Quarter children came up and waxed the great ball-room floor until they rolled about on it like fat brown beans. And there were dinners on the

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lagoon, and moonlight riding parties and breakfasts at Marie's, and then—at last—the ball! Sometimes it was a masquerade, and then our mothers kept their costumes secret—even from their dearest friends. You know, one time, Rodriguez Nedron, who was the bachelor-beau of all New Orleans, led the cotillon with Aunt Nanon—your mother—and in one figure he grew quite mad over her and asked for her hand. She only laughed and disappeared through the shutters on to the balcony; and later—oh, it was funny—he had supper with Madre, and"—her voice rippled deliciously—"he said the very same things to her! Well, you may imagine—when they unmasked! The poor Rodriguez!—to have made love to two sisters! But they, our mothers, had been taught the duty of perfect graciousness, and they told him sweetly that neither of them could bear to take such happiness from the other. And they each gave him the rose from their hair. Ay, yi! Those were the days of perfect living!"

The perfect voice trailed off into dreamy silence, as Lilith propped her head upon her bent wrist, and gazed off into the misty harbour. But Zona knew that her imagination was but that of the plate exposed, and that she was only repeating what she had heard many times in many fashions. It was a repetition full of sympathy, however, and it explained the reason of much of Lilith's un-Americanism—as Zona knew the word.

"I wonder if Mr. Wayne went to any of the balls?" The girl probed again for connexion between that past and this present.

"He was too young—our grandfather died twelve years ago, you know, and he had to stop having house-parties before that. My mother said she had often

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heard him say that when he could no longer have life and gaiety, and happy, flitting things about him, then he wanted to die—and very quickly. I think the going of his children—his two stars, he called them—saddened him very much. But Mr. Wayne says he remembers him as a kind, merry-eyed old gentleman."

"I always thought that it was very unreasonable of papa, and Uncle Robert too, never to allow us to visit grandfather."

"They were afraid. My mother said that no one whose blood had flowed through the glamour of New Orleans could ever withstand the city's tug at their hearts. She said that my father would never permit me to go there."

"But you have wanted to?"

"Wanted to?" Lilith's long eyes rounded with amazement. "Do you not want to go to heaven when you have toiled through purgatory? I do. But I knew I couldn't, and even Jack has never happened to take me when he was going there. I shall go, I suppose, when it is time; at least the priest says so."

Zona opened her mouth, but shut it again quickly. She was so elementally unreligious that it seemed an impertinence for her to pick flaws in an object of which she was ignorant. First her father, and then her courses in science, had shredded the early legends of her mother's teaching into a dim web of fiction. Since she had thought at all, she had reduced Christianity, along with everything else, to the level of social ethics; and there her analysis stopped.

"Perhaps when we go home," Lilith went on, "you and I might go South for a month or two. Jack would be bored with it, but he would not mind at all our going together. And now that you have not

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your father, I hope you are going to spend a great deal of time with me."

"Oh, yes," said Zona, trying to be enthusiastic, and failing of course. "I—it's horrid of me, Lilith, but you know papa's death was not a poignant loss to me; in fact it was a great release. That last year, after I had finished college, and when he was so much worse"—Zona meant more irritable—"I was selfish enough to look forward to this time of independence."

Lilith looked neither shocked nor interested. She was a woman of only five senses, even though those five were keen to the point of abnormality.

"There must have been many men who wanted to marry you," she remarked, a little puzzled.

Miss Raimund sniffed. "I should never have chosen that way out, you may be sure. If I marry at all, it will be because I have found congeniality."

Lilith stretched her lovely bare arms above her head with a sigh of complacency. She had found it in a very satisfactory way. "But your friends who have married are quite happy. Mrs. Phelps, for instance, and the Delafield girls, and Jack and I——"

It was well for Zona that her back was turned to the gray couch, or the quick smile that flashed over her face must have betrayed her. "You certainly seem perfectly contented," she said, beginning to take down her thick chestnut hair.

"You are going to dress," guessed Lilith, sitting up with sudden interest. "Mr. Wayne said he had asked some people for tea, didn't he? I suppose I must be dressing, too, yes?—though this couch is heavenly." She looked back at it with regret, a dreamy languorous creature; then she wrapped her green robe closer about her, kissed Zona's cheek softly, and disappeared through the farther door.

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"Of all anomalies! She puts me in a rage and then fascinates me with her mediaevalism, and again in five minutes she makes some absurdly simple remark like that about her and Cousin John being happy! And with it all she's so childishly kind and fond of me—next to her fondness for clothes and comforts. Oh, I can't decide; maybe I don't know anything about her after all!'

Which was one of the wisest remarks Zona had made for some time. Intellectuals, analysts, euphuists—she knew them with singular thoroughness; they were the only type she had met in her father's house. And at college the same genus had still gathered her in, so that she had come into contact with few of those frank and generally attractive young persons who "go in" for education as a means to many "larks." With Zona, it was a case of "this one thing I know;" and the rest—the religious, the temperamental, the mysterious, undercurrent sensual—were blanker to her than the uncut pages of Balzac.

That despised individualist, Roger Maddox, had, during his short acquaintance with her, more than once been startled by her marvellous inexperience when he had gone exploring into the crevasses of her personality. One could go just so far, delightedly, surprisedly—finding remarkably keen logic and almost masculine mathematics; then without warning, without the slightest intermediary limbo, came crudity—or rather the total unskilfulness of an overgrown child learning to walk. Nor was he sure that she had even begun to learn. But he had—not quite disinterestedly—tried to encourage her start.

Zona twisted up her hair, and pulled out the first dress she came to—they were all white, so what did it matter? Beside Lilith she would never be noticed,

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anyhow. When she had visited in Washington, some paper had accorded her "that typeless charm of irregularity of feature and extraordinary colouring"; but with her cousin, she felt like an angular puppet that moved in jerks, and appeared to herself unutterably ridiculous: ridiculous only from the physical standpoint, however; Zona had no false modesty about her brain!

When Lilith came for her, she almost hesitated in her confidence at possessing the best thing—brain looked for the moment inconsequential compared with the goods that tease the eye. Lilith herself had smiled faintly at the sum of Agnes' ministrations. There are few women who can wear, with distinction, collarless frocks and yellow laces delicately insistent upon paleness of skin less ivory than the pearls against it. As they went down Zona found, half angrily, that it was difficult to tear her eyes away from all this textile perfection; and the spiteful question nagged her: could her intelligence ever prove as potently attractive?

Perhaps it was sudden self-distrust which made Zona hold her head straight and higher than usual, as they went out on to the wide verandas; whatever it was, it stirred the something sluggish which is never absent in Eastern tea-parties—no matter how racy the gossip—and drew to her that quick, deep breath of interest such as only freshness can call out. Beauty—well, yes, they have it occasionally, even where the thermometer beats out complexions; but the crisp vigour of unused vitality—never!

So it was that Zona came in for her share of the onslaught which the little group of expatriates made upon the newly-arrived. "For you may say what you please, my dear," Mrs. Levering (whose husband

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was in Tea) said aside to Mrs. Twinehurst (whose brother was with a Trading Company), "she has twice the vivacity of Mrs. Armistead—and for all Caro Soper's raving, vivacity gets ahead, always! See how she has captivated that Mr. Winthrop already!"

You can see that even in the East the tongues of women move in spurts; for Winthrop was at that moment merely being presented. However he too was new, and in his clever dark face Zona read rescue. Out of the score of colourless semi-animated residents grouped languidly about the consul's veranda, he promised more, to her, than the mere reflex welcome following upon an unbearable monotony. With her quick, analytic sensitiveness, the girl looked about—taking inventory of those among whom she was to spend the next few months.

There was Mrs. Soper's husband—a merry, round-faced little man, wearing his cloth with the same joyous absence of dignity that a pet dog wears a bow; Zona wondered how he had ever "happened" in the cryptic East. Somehow one never wondered how his wife had happened there; with her the puzzle consisted in how she chanced to be his wife at all. In violence of all tradition, Mrs. Soper was not small and fair-haired and inclined to cattiness—like the regulation story-book rector's wife; but slim and olive-skinned, with great dark eyes that could yet slant into mere slits, and a twisting, friendly mouth which showed many emotions—and concealed many more. Zona felt actively attracted to Caro Soper; and—strangely—rather subtly repelled by her as well. There was something—but one could not define it. Glancing now at Caro, where she stood the centre, the regulating spirit, one felt, of the little crowd of

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colonists, Zona decided after all that it must have been merely her over-desiccating imagination, that had docketed Mrs. Soper as a person with a phase of the sinister. The girl's eyes passed humorously to two English young ladies—introduced as nieces of the ample Mrs. Twinehurst—who stood like very frilly mummies, decorated respectively with a blue and a pink sash, and smiling with vague condescension on everybody, especially the curate. He—whose name by the way was Jenks—was a fat blond man, of the sort that always has a " voice " ; Zona shuddered as she listened to the rumble of it, speaking with a figureless person in pink—a countess somebody, with a poodle.

And then there were others—the girl observed them all in a swift, summarizing survey—and then came back to Winthrop, with a frank little sigh of relief.

Caro Soper, watching her, smiled slightly. " I think your cousin will like it here," she said, turning to Lilith.

" Oh, I hope so ! "—Lilith sounded a trifle anxious. " Zona is so energetic and so—so—— "

" I know—you mean she will have to cool down. But then there is plenty of life, even in Hong-kong, and the novelty of it may distract her *ennui*. Do tell me, is your husband away for long ? I want to plan my little dinner-party for you, up at the Peak, you know, while it's still full moon and the view of the harbour so wonderful."

Lilith's long eyes opened blank. " I do not know when Jack is coming back," she answered simply. " We never write to each other, and I believe he was quite undecided when he left."

Mrs. Soper took in the American woman's unassumed composure with increased interest. She had had

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the magnificent dominance of the American wife dinned at her for so long that this deviation—matter of fact without being suspiciously indifferent—pricked her imaginative sense. That Mr. Armistead's movements were of no meaning to Mrs. Armistead's contentment, she saw as clearly as the reason of the condition was clouded.

"Perhaps you will know in a day or two," she suggested smoothly, "and then, if you remember, you will send Len up with a scrap of a chit? I want to have just a few people to meet you. The Dyers —he's Governor, you know—and Mr. Winthrop, the man talking to Miss Raimund—and the famous Mr. Maddox, if he's here; then one or two others. It will be easy to get them together now that we have all moved up to the Peak for the summer. You see the whole colony—except his obstinacy, Mr. Wayne —transplants itself regularly every July; when you see the city from there by moonlight you will understand its clutch on our orientalism."

"I want to see everything," said Lilith, including Wayne in her serious, sweet smile.

He handed her her tea with a little bow of homage. "You can't, unfortunately, see the perfectest thing," he said, not as neutrally as he always spoke. And Caro Soper, whose gaze had passed eagerly to Lilith, noticed surprisedly that the beauty's eyes were not gray, as she had supposed, but green—deep, clear, jade green. The slight curve upward of Lilith's figure as she turned to the consul held something which reminded Caro of Egypt—she hardly knew how. Perhaps the dancing girls who swayed before the guests of big hotels possessed a hint of the same grace.

Mrs. Soper left Lilith and crossed over to Mr. Jenks,

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whom, as her husband's curate, she occasionally admonished when his appetite and his amiability muddled each other's motives.

"Why don't you go and talk to Miss Raimund?" she asked severely. He was crudely devoting himself to cake and a great deal of lemon squash.

"I—er, it's so hot," he began lamely.

"That is not a new compliment to Hong-kong," returned the chaplain's wife with some dryness. "Besides, you eat here a good deal, you know."

The curate got up heavily and moved off towards Zona, who looked vainly about for egress when she saw him coming. Winthrop had fulfilled the distinction of his profile, and Zona was enjoying herself. But Mrs. Soper's rebuke called a tedious halt.

The curate stood twisting his ring—it was a turquoise, and he wore it on the middle finger—and mumbling irrelevant rhapsodies on America, which he had never seen; and soon the two English girls, who had bashfully waited for one of the parochial clan to start amenities, filed up and hoped that she liked the East.

Zona said mendaciously that she did; and after that there was quite a lively race between the sister with the pink sash and the sister with the blue sash (otherwise they were exactly alike), both of whom recited the attractions of oriental life in breathless sequence. When he had the chance the curate broke in, and also the figureless pink person, who, being step-niece of an arch-duke, and three times married herself, had no idea of being left on the outskirts.

"I haf you assured, dear mees," she wheezed, "you will find our leetle colony vairy exclusif. Mr. Jenks will reinforce me that we are most particulaire."

"Very, very," reinforced Mr. Jenks with jerky

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emphasis. "But to the right people, Frau Gräfin, to the right people."

"Oh, of course to the right people we are quite charming, are we not, Eunice? One has only to gain an irreproachable introduction into——"

"Yes, an irreproachable introduction into our little circle, and we really can't do enough for them, can we, Violet? I am sure you'll agree, Miss Raimund, that——"

"That we're a very jolly lot, oh, quite an unassumingly jolly lot, you know, that is we——"

"We haf our leetle quarrels, our leetle regonzil'yations, yes? We ar-re one big family, like you say —united, isn't it?"

"Oh, but I'm sure, dear Frau Gräfin, Miss Raimund won't like us if you say we have our quarrels, will she, Eunice?"

And so they chased the butterfly back and forth, until even Zona was tired, though she hadn't said a word. Winthrop, watching her, made up his mind that she was of a nature that entered in too much. He could see her worn out by other people's anxieties, sick over other people's follies; when she should be de-vitalized, she would be an alluring woman, he thought.

"Will you go for a curio hunt with me some morning?" he asked, when the curate and the countess and the pink and blue girls had balled themselves up in a corner with their conversation, and left him once more with something to say. "I've promised a friend of mine in Paris to pick up some Eastern brasses for her, and I need feminine discrimination to help me. But perhaps you find the mornings too hot——"

"Don't, for pity's sake, mention the word hot to me!" cried Zona. "It seems as though the whole

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world has gone dumb, except for that eternal excuse. I shall be grateful to you for all time if you'll only take me out some sweltering morning and give me something to perspire over. Now I've been vulgar, haven't I? I can see Lilith looking at me. But——"

"Don't care about that. I understand. You mean that one's mind needs other things to feed upon than cool drinks and shady places."

Zona looked about her. "I mean it ought to," she said.

He smiled. "How long have you been here, Miss Raimund?"

"Five days; why?"

"Then you have hardly had time to find out that this Eastern scorch withers more than complexions. You looked about for other discontent, just now, and you could find none parallel to yours. Why? Because—well, because none of these people had the foresight to go out and hunt brasses." When he smiled that way, behind his glasses, Zona decided that she liked him very much. He looked like her Analytics professor for whom she had had a sophomoric weakness.

"Your point, then, is to keep my discontent above scorch?"

"Exactly. I have found out how the Chinese do it, but I shan't use their method. You see, they sink it underneath—discontent and some other things, and—but you'll find all this out for yourself. It's in the sun, and in the damp, and in the very habit of the punkah. Oh!" he broke off with a sudden intensity—"I can understand why people who live here have either to boil down into mere stupid dummies or else burn up in the madness of perceiving what they can't track out. It is maddening, this

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something every Oriental knows and that no Westerner can find out. We call it inscrutability. How do we know what it is?"

"Perhaps if you stay long enough——" Zona began. "I believe Mr. Wayne knows."

Winthrop looked past her at the consul, who, while pleasantly the host, bore a something of detachment—an air of difference, not only from the Americans, but from the other residents. It was not a difference of feature, nor a matter of colouring; that would have been easy of analysis.

"It's that same thing that isn't anything," murmured Winthrop, half irritated. "Yes, he has it. And he'll never give up the secret. None of them do."

"I believe you mind that more than all the rest," the girl smiled: "not their having the secret, but their burying it."

"Certainly I do. A secret's common enough, but this pretending not to have one—it's a fanaticism of cleverness. Look at Wayne—you might know him for ten years, and never know more about him than that he has a passion for lemon-squash. All the rest is sunk—wilfully caved in under a pile of waste-material preferences. Oh, if I could only drag it out—slice it up, and pick it to pieces for the world—this orientalism! But I can't!"

Zona took furtive inventory of the stooping shoulders and keen impatient eyes. "Why did you come here?" she asked directly, making up her mind that he was a scholar, possibly a writer.

"I came to do the thing I can't," he returned; "to analyze the Oriental—to find why there's a yellow peril, and so forth. The only thing I have found out, is that the reason of 'peril' lies in impossi-

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bility to analyze. How can one analyze a mind which is layered like the man layers his body—a new coat every season; and all the old rags left under as padding! Poof! You will think me a very difficult person, Miss Raimund, but I'll promise to do better with brasses. When shall we go hunting?"

"Any time at all; and—" Zona's eyes shone—"I really don't think you're a bit difficult, you know. I—I get so sick and tired of being treated like a puppet!"

"Then suppose I come for you to-morrow—at ten. That will give us time to get as sweltered as you like by tiffin!" He was conscious of an enjoyable sense of self-approval—her assent was so frankly eager; and his good-bye held that insinuating cordiality which recognizes and promises much more than fluctuating acquaintance.

"So much begun," surmised Mrs. Soper, with an untranslatable twist of her restless mouth as she drew Zona into the line of conversation. "I have just been urging on Mrs. Armistead to frivolity—really foreign missions, you know, since new people are the only gospel we get. Goodness! I hope Rollo didn't hear that!—he's so tender of the gospel!" She made sure that Mr. Soper was occupied in docile flirtation with the countess before she went on to elaborate.

"You see, Miss Raimund, now that Mr. Wayne has once committed the indiscretion of showing you, he has the responsibility of a social secretary on his hands. We shall book you for months ahead."

Zona glanced at Wayne. "Is the consul to keep the books?" she asked, with suspicious innocence.

Mrs. Soper shrugged. "I suppose Len will have to do that—he being responsible for most of the

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things Mr. Wayne likes to leave undone. But seriously, or I mean frivolously, we are planning unheard-of dissipation on the Peak. Now that we are done with the agonies of moving, we have energy to be gay once more. Mrs. Levering is going to give a dance, and Mrs. Twinehurst a bridge party, and the Lorrilard girls are talking of a tennis tea."

"Have some more punch, do," suggested Wayne. "I'm getting all hot and mussy, just thinking about it."

"You always were the most subtly ungrateful, Randal!" Only in moments of great severity did Mrs. Soper drop formality, which shows again that she was an original person. "I am sure Mrs. Armistead and Miss Raimund want to see more of Hongkong than your garden. And it's time some one came to pull you out of your shell. Really, when I heard about Leipsic——!" her mouth curled up with her eyes, until she looked almost Chinese.

"You know there's a very great deal in a name, after all——" Wayne's eyes lingered on Lilith, meditatively. "Leipsic reminds me of hog and sausage. It sounds like soap and beeswax—undeservedly slippery. Now Hong-kong—well, I came here in the first place just because I liked the name. You can hear the temple bells ringing back of it."

"As they don't ring here at all," said Mrs. Soper dryly. "Never mind, I'm going. We are to dine on the 'Luzon' with the Ritchies. I must extricate Rollo. And I'll take all these other people too for you, shall I?"

She moved with a definite quietness, which contrasted curiously against the mobility of mouth and eyes. It was a very few minutes before she had headed Wayne's last dozen guests through the

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garden and out to their "chairs" and their coolies.

"How pretty they all look!" cried Lilith delightedly, gazing down upon the confused little group. "The women's flowers on their white gowns, and the gay cushions in the chairs, against those café-au-lait coolies,—and Mr. Soper's green helmet!"

"I wonder," said Wayne, looking only at her, "why it is you take such pleasure in colour?" Because he knew quite well, he spoke in an undertone—he had an idea that Zona knew too: she stood off from them, also watching from the steps.

Lilith smiled with a vague sweetness. "My mother was Spanish—or almost Spanish. She taught me to love colour—to understand it."

"Did she give you nothing else that is Spanish?" Wayne's voice sank still lower.

"She——"

"Aren't they impassive?" Zona turned back from watching the little procession swinging down the road on the shoulders of the riddle—Winthrop's riddle. "Chinamen, I mean. You feel that——" She stopped suddenly, conscious of having broken in—for Zona had a sixth and seventh sense, in spite of the fact of her five common interpreters being as yet rather awkward.

"Yes," Wayne suggested politely.

"I believe I'll write some letters before dinner, if you will excuse me." Zona, once aware, vanished into the house without waste of hesitation.

Wayne, looking after her, could not be sure of her irony. "Miss Raimund moves with all the swiftness of a comet——" He meditated. "The swiftness and—I wonder——" He turned to Lilith with a sigh of satisfaction. "Come and sit here.

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I want to know more about your mother. How did she happen to marry into New England? Spanish in New England! Imagine it!"

Lilith's slow caressing voice held a tinge of pity. "Poor madre—you see her mother had married an American, and had been happy, so she imagined——"

"But Colonel Tanguey—your grandfather—was Southern—New Orleans—that is absolutely incomparable."

"I know, but she, poor dear, didn't stop to think of that. She loved my father, like a Spanish woman loves—you know? It is different."

"Yes." Wayne leaned over to arrange her cushions.

"And"—Lilith's breath came a little faster—"she married him, in spite of all people told her. Poor madre! It was New England and that cold Protestant bigotry, that killed her."

"And you—you hated New England too?"

Lilith nestled deeper into her cushions. "I do not like cold of any kind," she said. "It was not so bad while madre was there, and we could talk together; but after she died I was quite alone. I had no friends—except the priest. You see"—she looked up at him ingenuously—"I—I went secretly to confess, and——"

"Yes," Wayne encouraged, moving toward her, in his interest. Then as he caught the flash of green between her lashes,—"Tell me about it," he said gently.

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CHAPTER III

NICHOLAS WAYNE was a man who had fallen into the habit of getting his own way: as Secretary of State this did not require much effort; as Randal Wayne's uncle, on the contrary, he found that it required a good deal. In his position, acknowledged head of an imposing Alabama family, the Secretary felt bound to "keep an eye on" Randal; if he did not, the Family were psychologically certain to twit him about it, at the next Thanksgiving dinner or twentieth reunion, or whatever it happened to be. For his own part, Nicholas Wayne liked "Randy"; moreover, he believed in every gentleman's right to go to the devil if he wanted to, provided he did it unobtrusively and with finish. And this was what, "they said," Randal had been giving undivided attention to, ever since he went to college. The Family as a whole deplored it; they said it showed such a lack. And no doubt it did. But rumour had been singularly quiet about Randal the last nine years; it seemed as though all but his name (that immortal possession of the house of Wayne) had vanished—dematerialized into a vague, expurgated memory such as replaces the well known truths of those souls that have actually separated themselves into another space. People in Mobile spoke of him as "poor Randal Wayne," and had even ceased to inquire about him; the Family, since he had never done anything which the newspapers had considered worth

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five thousand miles of transmission, had settled back with a sigh, and turned his uncertainties over to Nicholas. To the Family he had become a shape; to Nicholas, however, he had become the essence of a disturbing quality—a thing without flesh and blood, and yet more definitely indissoluble than the most stolid body. It was obstinacy that Randal Wayne meant to his uncle, obstinacy of the most baffling, intangible fixedness; and, to a man used to having his own way, this fact of circumvention on the part of an absent and wholly unimportant factor in his scheme of executive, provoked more than mere wrath. With Nicholas Wayne, Randal had become an obsession. Everything else in life was woodenly concrete, placeable, easy of control—except Randal. If he had not been so continuously besieged with official business the Secretary would have been forced out of his own curiosity to go round to Hong-kong and see if such a person as Randal Wayne actually existed, or whether there was not some stupendously elusive stubbornness flitting about under protection of the title. He really meant to go some day; it had become his darling mania—to get hold of Randal.

Sitting in the smug respectful assurance of his Washington office, the Secretary toyed irritably with a cable-form. "I'll try him once more," he muttered, "and then—by the Lord, I'll *make* him." (Some one of the Family had asked him last Sunday at dinner "what had become of poor Randy"—if he had not been able to get him a promotion.) And because he knew that here was something he could not make, he waited feverishly impatient to see what Randal was going to do about it.

If he could have looked across into the sleepy watchfulness of that other office, perhaps he would not have

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been so puzzled. The marvellous adaptability of inanimate things making for that consciousness we call atmosphere, might have whispered some answer, some hint at least, to the Secretary's conundrum.

For one thing the curt yellow envelope lay unopened on the office desk, as it had lain for three days. The consul had told his secretary that he would open it; but the heat for the last week had outdone itself and it was cooler just outside the office windows, on the veranda where Lilith sat—her eyes spreading under their jealous lids like a slow-swaying fan, her hands fingering an exquisite carved ivory ball, into whose mellowness they melted and lost animation.

"There are thirteen others inside," suggested Wayne with a quiet suddenness—he had bought the ball for her the day the cable came. "If you take a pin, or better one of Len's quills, you can get to the very smallest, and even that is carved."

One would have wondered, if one had not been Lilith, whether it was perhaps that—peering into the smallest carved circle, the minute innermost perfection—which had narrowed the consul's eyes to their present all-perceiving inattention.

"I would rather feel it—just the outside," answered Lilith dreamily, caressing the cool smooth-rough surface. "It makes me forget how hot it is."

"Miss Raimund went out with Winthrop, didn't she? I have noticed that she quite refuses any concessions to the thermometer." Wayne smiled slightly as his eyes, wandering through the window of the office, fell on the yellow envelope, whose pert oblong the thermometer had so blatantly overruled.

"Yes. Zona is almost always out—like Jack. Jack goes for money; but I do not know what Zona goes for. She comes home very draggled." Lilith

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looked down at her soft green gown with a simple satisfaction.

"That is one of the misfortunes accruing to the higher mind," agreed Wayne, fully conscious that he was talking only to himself. "It has absolutely no influence with materials. I am glad that you——" He paused, his eyes adding their appreciation of the green frock. Since two weeks ago, when she had told him about her religion, he had been quite impersonal with her.

"Beg pardon, sir"— It was the secretary's thin deprecating voice that came from the long office window—"but there's that cablegram, you know. Shall I open it, sir?"

Wayne contemplated him reflectively. He was an ordinary enough young man, undersized and sandy-haired, with an abrupt clicking manner, like his typewriter, and an occasional ashamed smile. On the whole, a very satisfactory young man.

"Yes, open it—that is——" Of a sudden Wayne caught Lilith's uninquiring gaze (the ivory ball had fallen from her fingers into her lap) and with it felt a curious presentiment, such as he never disregarded, a presentiment of the importance of an apparently trivial thing—"I'll open it myself," he said, rising slowly.

The secretary's keen jaw dropped. "Ye—es, sir," he stammered, receding nervously into the office. On his way he could not resist a glance at the tube of mercury that hung by the window. It registered a hundred and ten in the office!

But the consul passed it without looking. In those superlatively rare moments when his interest was aroused, all the monotonies of climate with which he occupied himself went into non-existence;

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yet Zona Raimund was convinced that Wayne had no mental processes.

He sat down by the unfamiliar desk and picked up the envelope with a sort of gentle contempt. Its triumph over his indifference only made it sillier; it was so without subtlety, so completely Occidental in its arrogance. Thinking in the language of the Occidental, Randal reflected that Nicholas Wayne must often have grudged the unaccomplishing dollars he had put out in messages whose imperative mood never got as far as Hong-kong. This one was so lengthy —for a cablegram—that the consul was led to pity his uncle's patent desperation.

"Organizing Consular Bureau (it ran). Headquarters Washington. Want you as Chief. Cable answer within ten days. Don't be a fool."

The terse remainder of this last clause brought Nicholas Wayne very clearly before Randal. It had been nine years since he had seen the unconquerable man of action, and since then he—Randal—had beaten him many times. Still—as he folded the yellow paper back into its hiding, the faint smile on his lips was balanced by a humorous consideration in the shutting eyes. "No answer—yet," he told his own secretary negligently, as he swung his long body back to the high veranda.

Then it came to him with distinct unpleasantness that Lilith was no longer there. He had told her he would be scarcely a minute—but he looked at his watch—then through the door that led, like so many of Wayne's doors and windows, from the house on to the large veranda—she must have gone up to dress; it was almost one, and tiffin-time. He sank into his favourite chair less contentedly than usual: one

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who has accustomed himself to every visible thing he wants, is apt to chafe at any sort of denial. Wayne realized that his veranda without Lilith was no longer satisfying. He picked up the ball of ivory that had pleased her—its intricacy unheeded—and studied its frequent punctures with an uncharacteristic concentration

"For her it is all round and simple," he murmured, half to himself, half to Wrinkles, sprawled diffusely over the reed rug. "These peep-holes into the inner mystery mean nothing to her. I wonder—could she look through and still be as interesting? Or would she come, like the rest of us, to the place where all perspectives meet and deny and re-assert themselves into a maddening non-existence! I wonder——" The hand that smoothed Wrinkles' hard round head was strangely tender; for a long row of faces seemed to float past in the smoke of his cigarette—women's faces, pleading, pathetic—a row so long that it reached back into that hazy green avenue labelled College, and so brought him once more to the wife of John Armistead. "She is like none of them," he concluded—not self-defensively, but as one states a fact—"she is all instinct—untaught; a self-evident improvement over her cousin, who is all teaching."

And as the cousin came round the corner of the veranda, quite as draggled as Lilith had predicted, he regarded her almost resentfully. To his mind she was so unnecessary. "Had you a satisfactory morning?" he asked her with grave courtesy, relieving her meanwhile of two cumbersome parcels which the absent minded Winthrop was apparently unaware of.

"Oh yes—yes indeed!" Zona sank down in one of the luxurious swinging chairs, and pulled off her hat with the enthusiasm with which she did everything. "The things at Hop Lee's are really wonderful, aren't

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they, Mr. Winthrop? We bought—but I must show you." And forgetting her distaste for Wayne, she dragged the heaviest bundle over to where the consul sat, and began tugging at the wrappings.

"I say, wait a minute—you mustn't do that!" Winthrop went over to her with an air already one of proprietorship; for during the brief two weeks they had become rather more than friends. Together they succeeded in knotting the twine constantly tighter about the package.

Wayne and Wrinkles looked on, with an occasional glance at each other. Wrinkles thought it an amusing game, though a bit tedious; Wayne reflected that it could not last long—tiffin and Lilith were due momentarily. "You'll stay to 'chow' with us?" he said to Winthrop, as the foam of a skirt swept the stairs he was watching through the door into the house.

"Eh? I beg pardon——" Winthrop straightened to a sitting posture, very red in the face and dusty about the fingers. "No, no, I can't really. I'm due at Mrs. Soper's to meet the—er—pink Miss Lorrilard. One meets that girl in the most extraordinary lot! There, Miss Raimund, I think that is all right now" (having at last arrived at the audacity of cutting the various knots, he unrolled the paper triumphantly for Zona). "You'll excuse me if I don't wait to hear their ecstasies over it. I believe I'm disgracefully late already."

"You're to be at Mrs. Soper's again to-night, aren't you?" asked Zona, with frank ingenuousness. The brass box lay forgotten on her knees.

"Oh, yes—at dinner, you mean. Yes, Caro told me by the way to urge you all to be punctual, Mrs. Armistead——" He crossed to meet Lilith, as she came out on to the veranda. "She says Maddox is fanatically prompt."

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"Oh, of course, if it's Mr. Maddox's dinner!" Zona's tilted nose tilted higher still.

"Certainly we will be on time," promised Lilith.

"What else is there to do?" supplemented Wayne, his eyes on Zona.

"I have a great deal to do," Miss Raimund answered immediately, as he had expected. "Good-bye, Mr. Winthrop." She watched Winthrop go off—watched him wistfully, and quite unconsciously. He must know Caro Soper very well!

"Is that a brass box?" Lilith held out her hand for it with the naturalness of a child. "A—aah!" She drew in her breath after the wondering manner of the natives. "It is beautiful—*belissima*! See how it gleams——"

"It took one man fourteen years to make it," put in Zona, pushing back her pretty mussed hair half impatiently. "Just one of those little scrolls——" But Lilith had vanished into the dining-room, and was holding up the box against Wayne's green draperies, her face intent, delighted.

"See! Everything comes out—all the carved places. Ah! It is perfect. When Jack comes home he must get one for me." The simple finality with which she said it narrowed Wayne's eyes upon her more than usual.

Her own eyes were gleaming like the brass, but softer; her lips were parted, her skin faintly tinged, like a camellia.

"She is looking through the curtain now—by help of a thumb we do not have," he told himself, "and the vision glorifies her. 'When Jack comes home——!'"

He had forgotten all about the yellow message.

Zona Raimund, taking his silence as she took all of him, restlessly, irritatedly, thought for the thou-

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sandth grateful time of the other man she saw most—Winthrop, who out of the beaten breath of Eastern lassitude had brought fresh air and stimulus to her perceptions. Wayne, Lilith, Armistead (what little she saw of him) aggravated her as creatures who depreciate; with each and all of them she felt the haughtiness of esoteric superiority. But with Winthrop she felt only the content of a far-reaching, mutual comprehension. Tritely, they "understood" each other. And—obviously because the Winthrops of the world belong to this period of feminine development—she thought about him a good deal, more perhaps than he had given her reason to.

For, in spite of the many hours he had spent with her, Winthrop was not a man who kept the personal always in aggression; not like that impudent runaway, Roger Maddox (invariably when she thought of *him*, Zona sniffed disdainfully) with his blatant disregard of what in college one had called "the higher plane"; what Winthrop once called, er—"mind attune." With Roger Maddox there never would be any such thing as mind attune; that was why Zona told herself frequently she so much preferred Winthrop. To browse about among old bronzes with him—rare collections of whatever stuff—hear his copious comment of their place in art, their authenticity, their probable relation to certain dynasties, certain philosophies—all this was meat and drink super-satisfying to the girl who was as yet wholly the student. What Lilith ecstacized over as "most beautiful," Winthrop presented to one "as the reflection of the sensuous spirit of the age"; by the simple deprecation of his tone forever exonerating himself of any association with the sense delightful. "It is exquisite, of course," he would concede reluctantly, over some piece of artis-

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tic craftsmanship, "just as any infinitely patient work is exquisite; but—the proof of a decided decadence in the ethical thought of the people, pointing to a whole gamut of voluptuous living soon to be run. For myself these things hold beauty purely as they are exponents of a beautiful Common Mind. Mere textile perfection is surely a very poor test of loveliness."

And Zona would—admiringly—agree with him. With singular fitness, he had stepped in to take the place of a favourite professor, was become a sort of post-graduate autocrat for her tastes and inclinations. A person who has been for four years part of such a system, whose natural judgments have grown used to being moulded and revised by some superior—but by some sympathetic superior, of course!—would feel lost, utterly unmoored, if at the end of that time the prop were to be wholly and unprovisionally withdrawn. In Zona's case this tutelage had evolved into a much more agreeable relation; in Winthrop the guide to education remained to her, but without the dreary supplement of text-books. There was, however, in the present evolution the new and dangerous element of propinquity, which no matter how stolid the insusceptibility of its victims always manages to do its impish work. One (rather I should say *two*) may be as impersonal as a crustacean and still, with propinquity——

"Have you known Mr. Winthrop a long time?" Zona asked Caro Soper, as they sat that afternoon in Lilith's room, talking over lemon squash, in the quick-ripening intimacy of idleness.

"Since I was fourteen," answered Caro, without smiling. "He came up to the Varsity when I was living in England—at Oxford, you know. An agreeable

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young person, Wyldon Winthrop, though a shade ascetic-minded."

"He has a perfectly wonderful mind," began Zona eagerly.

"I suppose so, as a pedant; I prefer Rollo myself. Did you say Mrs. Armistead was in there?" Caro nodded toward the dressing-room.

"Yes——" Zona left the former subject reluctantly. "She and Agnes are going over her dresses—deciding what she shall wear to-night, you know." It was evident from the curl of the girl's lip that her own costume would be a matter of not much moment. Lilith will come in after that is settled."

"She is the most interesting woman I ever saw, your cousin," remarked Mrs. Soper thoughtfully. "She says so very little, and it means so very much—she is like Mr. Wayne in some respects."

"I never heard him say anything that meant much," blurted out Zona, who did not fancy having her judgment of two inferior intellects shaken.

"No one hears it," Caro's smile curled peculiarly; "that is why it is so wonderful. He is more of the East than the very East itself. No one but an Oriental could appreciate him, really." Her speech stopped with an entire completeness that was itself very Oriental.

"Have you lived out here long?" asked Zona, regarding her curiously.

The other woman's great black eyes lengthened like a native's. "I was born in England, but I came back just as soon as I could. I married a man who was coming," she added with uncomfortable significance.

"Then you know it very well."

"One cannot *know* it——" Caro's eyes slanted more than before; it seemed impossible that they should ever have been large. "That is the trouble

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with Wyldon," she went on almost irritably. "He comes out here to get to know it with a microscope in his hand, when his naked eye can see nothing! They send him to track out fine shades of a problem whose first large facts he cannot comprehend. It isn't the fault of his cleverness, of his training; it is simply that in an atmosphere like this, cleverness and training go for nothing."

"What is it that goes for something?" In the humility of Miss Raimund's interrogation one read the upsetting of her stoutest props. More gods than John Armistead's were being overturned by the "atmosphere" he scouted.

Caro looked at her speculatively. "The ability to feel," she said slowly, "to feel the unspoken, the invisible, the tasteless and intangible—and to feel them involuntarily, or semi-involuntarily, as one breathes and is conscious." She glanced at Zona furtively—it was a disconcerting desiccation to lay before a person ruled by intellect. Lilith would make a much easier Oriental.

"A question purely of sense at its subtlest, you mean"—Zona gave an uncertain little laugh—"a case in which the most receptive guesses the conundrum (already she had caught many images from Winthrop) and one has only to sit still and let things soak in."

"If one has sponge enough," supplemented Caro, feeling intuitively that the girl had not; and therefore pitying her. "There is nothing like perfect idleness to bring out one's main idea, is there?"

"I never thought idleness brought out anything," returned Zona—who at college had been called "awfully sincere" in her convictions—"I should say activity would be a much truer test."

"That is because you are delightfully young." Caro's smile took away the sting of it to twenty-three,

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"The philosophy of the passive hasn't yet got hold of you. But it will"—she looked at the girl a little sadly—"and you will realize one day"—the agreeable voice gathered intensity—"that only in absolute inactivity does the strongest in us come out. A person has not time to be himself when he's hurried twenty hours out of the twenty-four; but put him in this dripping drone-land for a while; or"—Zona thought the delicate hands would break themselves—"in a still, still little English garden—and his gods will sort themselves for ever. Every one's do," she concluded, leaning back in her chair with a dreary little sigh.

"My gods are already established," announced Zona firmly—the more firmly as she felt an unaccountable misgiving with regard to them.

"You think so? Wait and see what this Hong-kong does to them." Through the lightness of the Englishwoman's voice, Zona felt a something sinister, an undefensive understanding of a spirit that was not English at all. It made the graduate strangely uncomfortable; in college one was given no instruction how to deal with such inscrutabilities.

"Anyway, I don't believe Hong-kong will do anything to Cousin John." She pounced upon the solidity which was used to vex her. "Nothing in this world could budge him."

"His wife could," murmured the married woman, half to herself, "if some one should happen to budge her."

"He is as good as gold, but without temperament. Papa used to say that Cousin John's ancestors——"

"Ah—they will out!" The pleasant English voice again took on that uncanny, probing note of comprehension. "We sit up in our arrogance and prate of individuality, and character—the stuff one's made of—

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while all the time they stand behind, smiling—just faintly—while they pull the wires, and we funny puppets respond. Ancestors! Why, they're all we are; so much 'us,' that we haven't consciousness of them; watch"—she leaned toward Zona so significantly that the girl shivered—"while you're out here, watch the way their evidence comes out—in speech, and little tricks of preference, but especially an instinctive taste, those small yet immense passions that tweak our large decisions——"

"*Si, si*—I will have that one, the amber colour. Bring it in here, Agnes——" Lilith herself was already dragging a mass of glowing yellow into the room. "Look!"—she spread it out before Zona—"I will wear this one, with the little sparkles and the red glisten in its shadows—— God of my life! Is it not beautiful?" She gathered the shimmering thing up in her arms, with a rapture of enjoyment that was almost tenderness. Then she became aware of Caro.

"I do beg you to pardon me,"—the robe dropped instantly—"I was not told that I had a guest. I have been very rude—and I do like you so much; your eyes are like Spanish eyes. Will you forgive me—yes?" Lilith had come swiftly forward, forgetful of the crumpled gorgeous gown, intent only on expiating her discourtesy.

Caro could not help glancing at Zona Raimund. "I have only to thank you," she said gently. "You were paying my dinner the greatest compliment in your power; and that is good of you, since I am obliged to give it without your husband."

"But certainly," answered Lilith, "I would want to look pretty for my friend. In this dress I am quite pretty," she added gravely, picking it up to hold against her before the glass.

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Zona Raimund regarded her impatiently. "Think I'll go into the garden, Lilith. I've monopolized Mrs. Soper till she will be glad to look at you for a while." Zona would never have believed that she might with equal truth have said "talk to you." "Didn't you say there were some stairs leading to it out of your dressing-room?"

"Agnes said so,"—Lilith was smoothing out the amber gown—"I have not noticed."

"Well, I'll explore—until this evening then, Mrs. Soper," and Zona's short white skirt vanished through the dressing-room door.

"She will get very hot," Lilith trailed her pale rose peignoir to the longest bamboo chair. "But she does not mind. She does not even use a fan."

"And you like to use one?" Caro's darting perception had already fastened on three of the graceful, languid things, lying conveniently about the room.

"But of course. My mother always used a fan, even in New England, where the people laughed at her—poor madre!" With a soft sigh of compassion, Lilith took up the nearest nest of sticks, and unfurled it slowly. "Your mother was English—no?"

"Yes—English." Caro's great black eyes seemed to grow all at once more opaque. "My grandmother was born out here," she added, a trifle breathlessly. "You see, her father—my great-grandfather—was a sea-captain, and he married away from home. No one in England ever saw his wife. But when she died he brought my grandmother, a very little girl then, back to his home in Oxford. And—we have always lived there ever since." She used the collective quite unconsciously.

"You do not seem to me English—no." Over her enormous swaying fan the other woman's long depth-

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less eyes looked steadily. "You seem to me—like Mr. Wayne," she finished, oddly denying both of them nationality.

Mrs. Soper laughed—a laugh that caught and shook not tears but something more tragic from its ripple. "Then you and I must be alike," she said, "for I was just telling your cousin that in some ways you remind me of Randal." She knew that she could never explain to Lilith how, so she turned quickly to something Mrs. Armistead could understand. "Your cousin—Miss Raimund—is attractive. The colony is going to like her; she has so much energy."

"She could be beautiful, with such black thick eyelashes, and lovely red hair." Any one but Lilith would have called the hair chestnut. "But she is too clever—she will not."

"I see. Her mother and yours were only half-sisters?" The insinuation proved Caro's dominant philosophy after an unexpected fashion.

"They were both Tangueys," said Lilith, sitting bolt upright, as though she had been attacked, "and Catholics," she added vehemently, her eyes seeking the black crucifix beside her bed.

"I see—of course—the same family, and the same religion." Caro made the other woman's instinct verbal, with a deftness that sent Lilith back satisfied against her cushions. "And your husband?" she asked suddenly. "Is he Catholic too?"

"He has not time for religion," returned Lilith, inhaling the sandal wood of her fan with long breaths of satisfaction. "I have prayed for his soul, but the priest says he will be damned." The calm acceptance with which she made the statement caused Caro to bite her lip—it was so patently inconsequent to Lilith—irrelevant was the word that insistently cropped up

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when one was considering the Armisteads as husband and wife. The friendship, too, between Armistead and Wayne was a curious circumstance, thought Caro, who had also come to be Wayne's friend in the years since he had grown so singularly into identity with her East.

"Did you know Mr. Wayne before, too?" she asked abruptly. "In America, I mean?"

"No." In Lilith's even voice there was no shade of surprise at the strange sequence of her guest's interrogation. "I did not know him until we came here; but he had visited in my grandfather's house." It was evident that she placed him in that connexion, rather than in any relation to her husband. "He has the most beautiful face I ever saw," she added dreamily.

"Um-m—yes—a great many women have thought so." Caro's tone was one of unresenting sophistry. "I believe——" rising with a sudden determination—"I will go and talk with him a bit, if you will excuse me—he—after one has learned him—he is a wonderfully satisfactory person, Randal; before——"

She looked down speculatively at the woman lying in such complete repose. If Lilith had not been quite so peacefully content, not quite so satisfied in the continued absence of her husband—but the dangers that lie about an unborn consciousness she knew poignantly enough, this elf-faced chaplain's wife; and where animation gathers only with the intrusion of hereditary passions—colour, family, the Church—the separate existence of a soul has yet to be begun. She bent still lower over the eyes that met hers with the clearness of a child's. "I will just go and talk to Randal," she murmured, kissing Lilith with an almost protecting tenderness.

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CHAPTER IV

"IT is distinctly rude of you to be in such good health," complained Mr. Maddox, regarding his dinner partner with a resentful admiration; "after our—ahem!—romantic affair on the boat."

"Are you speaking of the time we got drenched to the skin, up on the captain's deck?" asked Miss Raimund tartly. "As far as I remember, that was the only affair of any consequence that we had."

He shook his head at her sorrowfully. "How you do cling to detail! It's clear (his blue eyes shot past her to the man beyond, with his clever scholar's face) some one has been undoing all my education of you. I really—for a while—had you trained up to a feeling for large generalities: flirtation, for instance—at least you were beginning to know how the word is held together!—and er—whales. It seems to me"—his impudent face grew mildly retrospective—"we even co-ordinated the two one night. Wasn't it whales we said we were staying on deck to watch?"

Miss Raimund looked at him disgustedly. Really, if Caro had to give a dinner (and Zona never could see what necessity there was for the stiff dress-up things), she might have given it without this—this *person* with his silly jokes. If only one might turn and talk to Mr. Winthrop—fairly martyred also, with the pink Miss Lorrilard on his other side—or even look at the

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view, which from the glass-enclosed dining-room was fascinating enough, with its polka-dotted city lights, hung like so many rows of a giant necklace, and its harbour barely outlined far below.

But there was always the Person. He had the most ingratiating and ingenious ways of obtruding himself upon one—pushing his claim so that there was left no way out, no possible escape from his conversation. Conversation was too dignified a word for it, Zona decided disdainfully. "When you talk, I always wonder why you attempt it," she told him crushingly, in answer to his question about whales.

"Taught to, from a child," he returned cheerfully. "Sometimes I think myself it was almost a pity: talking's so unappreciated nowadays. Why, everybody tries to do it!"—the lightning blue eyes swept pityingly about the table. "Even Wayne, with all his restraint, can't keep from having a fling at a few well-chosen words!"

At last he had her interest. "You knew Mr. Wayne at college, didn't you?" she questioned slowly, her eyes following his to rest on the serene impassive face. "What—what did you think of him?"

From his height Maddox looked down at her curiously; had she started already on an excursion into the under-current of which he had found her so miraculously ignorant?

"I knew him, yes," he said casually, "though not intimately, as I was a freshman—just a kid—when he graduated. You see, Armistead was at Yale when Wayne was a freshman—comes along like a sort of House-that-Jack-built arrangement—they belonged to the same rowing club that I joined later; that's how I came really to know them both in the first place."

"But what did you think of him?" she persisted;

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"Mr. Wayne, I mean. What do you think of him now?" In the safety of the large party—they were over twenty as they sat grouped about Caro's attractive, rose-strewn table—she waited attentively for his answer. Only that morning Winthrop had asked her what *she* thought of the consul; and she had been mortified to find that she could not frame any definite reply whatsoever. Perhaps now this old friend of his (though he was confessedly not such an intimate friend, and a good four years younger) might give her some suggestion. For the moment she put aside her disdain for Maddox and listened eagerly.

"I think—from the little I've seen"—he was choosing his words carefully, since he saw that she attached importance to the question—"that he is become the essence of the East. What I used to think of him was that he was merely an ordinary Southern scapegrace—never ordinary though, after all," he retracted, "there was always a touch of something odd—un-American about him. But now—in the few days since I've been here he seems to me hardly flesh and blood—more the spirit of something—and that's funny, isn't it?"—his smile went to Zona boyishly (for with all his height he seemed even younger than twenty-eight)—"when you say I'm such a hopeless materialist!"

"No"—for the first time she abandoned the habit of taking him scornfully—"I don't think it's funny. I—what I mean is, everything out here makes one feel that way, doesn't it? Everything is so—so negative." The unspoken and invisible—the tasteless and intangible!—more than once since the early afternoon had that quiet speech made her uncomfortable. "Mrs. Soper says that only in perfect idleness does one's real self come out truly—so perhaps you are right, and Mr. Wayne may be at last what he had always been under

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the surface: the essence of the East. But "—she shivered a little—" it's rather an uncanny idea, isn't it?"

"It is." Maddox regarded her with added interest. He had not expected it to get hold of her so soon. "I wonder," he went on hurriedly, as from her other side Winthrop showed signs of interrupting, "what our real selves will prove to be—if you, for instance (again that cheerful impertinent smile), evolve into a coquette? Get to use your sex with a little less rigidity?"

Zona coloured angrily. The minute the personal note was struck, she withdrew into her old antagonism, and put out all her thorny defences. "I don't see why, the minute we get started on a sensible discussion, you always have to turn and talk about me," she said aggravatedly. "Why can't you let me alone?"

"I often ask myself the same question," returned Maddox mildly; "perhaps it's just because I'm naturally philanthropic; when I see you disregarding your greatest asset, doing your best to keep one whole side of you from ever growing to perfection (or even to being at all, for that matter) I simply have to step in and do what I can to prevent the massacre. Seriously now, why do you plume yourself on your superiority to physical impression? It's such an exposure of ignorance, such a waste of wits."

"In other words, you think I'm hopelessly crude!"

"Not hopelessly, but helplessly. What would you do, for instance, if I were to kiss you?"

"Box your ears," replied Miss Raimund instantly.

"Exactly. Your wits wouldn't be of the slightest assistance to you. You would have to fall back on a physical punishment the very first thing. Just that shows how dependent you psychic people are on your muscles—and how ineffectual they are; I should simply kiss you again, you see."

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She reddened in spite of herself. "And what would you advise in—in a case of that kind?"

Maddox grinned. "Wait and see," he said maliciously. "When you will have outgrown being merely a mind, you may possibly know yourself. I fancy"—looking across the table—"Mrs. Armistead could tell you."

"Lilith—why, she's never known an emotion in her life—that is, to recognize it." In her resentment at being turned over to her cousin for any sort of instruction, Zona again forgot her scorn of him and answered seriously. "She feels things only through her eyes and at her finger-tips."

"Which after all is the normal way to start out. When the rest of her education comes along, she will handle it more competently than you, who are doing French embroidery before you have learned buttonholes."

"That sounds rather suspiciously domestic," retorted Miss Raimund, evading the implication of it.

"Shouldn't wonder if my real self does show tendencies that way, out here!" The blue of his eyes fired into hers with a sudden meaning intensity. "I think I might be less of a failure domestically than otherwise. Anyway, the East——"

"I've come to think it's an illusion," interrupted Winthrop firmly. "A mirage, just real enough to taunt us into tagging it. There really isn't any East. It——"

"No East?"

"My dear young man, you——"

"There, auntie, it's only Mr. Winthrop's little joke, isn't it, Eunice?"

"Such a quaint fancy, isn't it, Violet?"

"But you haf been here already six months, isn't

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it? Und the East, it is not of a retiring temperature, no! Vat say you is——"

"Quite outside of reason, Frau Gräfin—quite, I agree with you. Of course, Mr. Winthrop is out here to say such things, but——"

"But he mustn't think it *proves* anything, must he, Mrs. Soper?"

"All of which does prove, my dear Wyldon," Caro's cool voice smiled at the little colony tempest, "that you should keep your epigrams for the unliteral-minded, —or else speak them *sotto voce*," she added, catching Zona's disgust. "Even Mr. Wayne, had he been given the chance, would have taken up the cudgels—would you not?" Her eyes dwelt lightly on Randal.

"I should not have had to. There is nothing that so supports itself as a perfectly effortless spirit." And because each of them knew that spirit so well—because they were the only ones there who did know it—their eyes dwelt in each other's sinkingly, for a moment, before they went back to their separate trivialities.

The colony slumped into its ordinary sluggishness, and attended to its dinner with even greater concentration than usual. Running over the deadly familiar faces, Caro was impressed more and more definitely with the truth of Wayne's statement: the languid group of residents would have roused itself for nothing else, as it had roused itself for the defence of an existence it could feel but indistinctly—an existence that was, in effect, merely a mirage. And what—Caro's fathomless eyes rested on the crevasses of Mrs. Twinehurst's dimples—could the vanishing image mean to say of them? A "really *shocking* climate," and the comfort of many servants! The dark-eyed chaplain's wife sighed. Perhaps, after all, it was better to sodden down early. Catching the expression of Randal

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Wayne's gaze as it lingered on Lilith, Caro was suddenly sure. "If one doesn't," she mentally observed, "human things get to be just atoms for analysis—I do wish Randal wouldn't look at her that way! He was noncommittal enough this afternoon; and now he reminds me of a spider. It's not pleasant."

Somewhat abruptly she rose to take the women out to the veranda. Wayne held the door for them, with a grave courtesy that narrowed into something less abstract, as the woman in her amber gown went past him. She moved with a slow stateliness that drew even an appreciation that believed itself exhausted; unconsciously Wayne lingered, looking after her—his tiresome self-realization less obtrusive than usual, as he watched her long undulating motion through the hall. And when he shut the door again, at last, and went back to the stale communion of the soda-siphon and its interminable stories, there came to him through it all the image of another civilization—a more gracious race of men and women, whose charmed history wove itself anew in the instinctive barcarolle of this woman's every move. Its poetry and its superstition, its ignorance and its intuitive perception, its dignity—and perhaps its undisputed passion, lay incarnate, vibrant, amber-clear for whoso wished (or rather had the recklessness) to probe.

Wayne understood this, and one other—Caro, whose own recklessness she herself had plugged by marriage with a playful little parson. No one could imagine better than she all that must lie dormant beneath the rose and ivory shell that covered this woman, crystal of countless Spanish generations; no one could have proved their knowledge better than by adopting, as did she without apology, the more distinctive "Lilith," instead of "Mrs. Armistead." And for all her innate

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mentality, Caro Soper knew—and knew why, also—she felt a sympathy for Lilith, a community of interest, such as she felt for none of those more or less normally intellectual women who made up the bulk of her husband's parish.

It was in recognition of this sympathy, that she slipped her arm through Lilith's as they all went out on to the high damp veranda—drew her to one side, as—Caro realized instinctively—life had always drawn her aside; singled her out, her, all unconscious, for some separate assignation.

"Would you not like to walk up to Rollo's look-out?" Caro asked her, with that same note of protecting tenderness that had come into her voice for Lilith in the afternoon. "It is just a few steps, and the view impresses one much more than from the veranda. You have your wrap?"

"Yes"—Lilith wound the soft satin thing luxuriously about her, delighted as a child who is chosen for some special attention—"we will go alone to see the view, you and I; we are running away from the others, no?" Her voice rippled in that delicious tantalizing way it had—almost but not quite a laugh. "It is this path we take?"

They had stepped off the veranda and were about to lose themselves in the thick fog that swathed the house in an exaggerated isolation. "This path," said Caro softly. Her dainty slippered feet, padding up the smooth boarded walk, were as nearly noiseless as a coolie's. "It seems almost too insulting to the imagination to promise you a view in a fog like this; but—we shall have one, or a sort of one."

In silence they walked the rest of the short distance to the little look-out box; and it seemed as though they walked much farther—very, very far from the

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chattering verandahful of women. Perhaps it was the fog that shut them away by themselves, like this; perhaps it was that underlying and (by Caro, at least) quickly realized sympathy, spreading itself beneath their silence like a magic wishing-carpet, and so taking them together into a world of their own. Whatever the influence was, Caro recognized its being—its significance, as they sat down close together on the cushioned look-out bench—Caro, who knew the intangible as Orientals know it.

"You see now"—she spoke very low—"how above the fog one is here; above and away from everything almost, it seems, doesn't it? Except those from whom we can never get away; nearer to them I think we are, up here."

"Whom do you mean?" Lilith was gazing at her a little fearfully out of her long, wondering eyes. "Who is it from whom we can never get away?"

The Englishwoman's glance, as it wandered from her guest out to the strangely heavy darkness, was sombre with an expression not English at all. "I mean those who have gone before, whose fate was bound about their necks as ours is bound; who are here now, watching us live their lives and sin their sins and suffer their penalties—over and over and over again! Our ancestors!" She faced about abruptly. "Do you believe in spirits, Lilith?"

That towel of thick yellow which hung between the hill and the harbour had caught up every vestige of human presence—every house, almost every light—had caught up the very night itself and fought it for the power to blot out shapes and forms.

"I—I—how odd and still it seems up here!" Lilith moved closer to the other woman. "I feel—I cannot tell you—almost afraid. Is it not stupid of

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me? But you were asking me if I believe in spirits, no? Of course I do! Do I not want to see my mother and my grandfather and all my family who are in purgatory—who are spirits now? But certainly, *si*; perhaps (she trembled suddenly) as you say, they may be here now, in this strange place—watching me. *Si, si*"—she looked about her anxiously—"they are here. Do you not feel them?"

A little tremor ran through Caro also. She had not been mistaken then, in this sympathy of the supernatural. "Yes, I feel them. I have felt them for many years—since I was a tiny English child, sent to play alone in the garden I felt them till I was forced to come out here to the East and find them! And out here"—suddenly she took the other woman's hand in hers—"I think you will find them too; out here where the strongest in us all comes out. You will get to know your ancestors—your spirits of control—at last, Lilith."

She understood only vaguely what Caro was talking about; but Lilith shivered. "I am—so stupidly—afraid," she pleaded. "Since I came to the East I feel so often this way." It was a child's eyes that besought Caro for diversion from the uneasiness.

And Caro—in her own fashion—gave it. "This influence in the air to-night," she began—in that tone with which one responds to the tell-me-a-story suggestion—"always makes me think of that anniversary of the Japanese, when they take their sampans, loaded with bread and wine and garments for another year, and row out into the water to meet the souls of their departed. Each tiny boat they turn adrift has a light, and they say that in the morning, of all those thousands of skiffs, not one is to be seen."

Lilith was listening absorbedly—as she had used to listen to her mother's stories.

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"So"—the quiet voice sounded rather strained—"they are permitted to minister to their fate; but here—we do not give even a light to these homeless spirits always round about us; neither to those who have gone out long ago, nor to those that are going out every day—every day, as they have gone since the first day."

"The natives give them things," interrupted Lilith, with the eager correction of one who has heard the story in some way before. "Yesterday, before our house, there was a funeral, and the family of the spirit burned clothes, and things to eat, and even books for him to read. I know," she concluded with simple positiveness, "because Mr. Wayne told me so."

"Ah!" In her turn, Caro was listening intently.

"Yes, and"— the child's tongue, once started, ran on, stumbling in its earnestness to impart—"there was one thing that did not catch—a lovely old bronze god—not such a big god, but so beautifully carved—oh, a very ugly god, but lovely, yes?" She waited only for Caro's understanding nod. "And they went away and left it, the family, without waiting to see if it would burn up; so Mr. Wayne said that I might have it, and he brought it in and took it up to my room. I do not know if you saw it, but it is the most wonderful god in the world—so ugly, and yet so beautiful too! Mr. Wayne said they called it the God of To-morrow—he said"—the clear voice became dreamy with mere repetition—"that every one had to burn one some day."

"Only some people's won't burn," said Caro a trifle grimly. "And—and that makes them ready to set fire to some other person's. Ah, well"—she rose with her quick, friendly smile—"I daresay I'm a croaking old *amah*, and one day I shall laugh at my own prophetic pulse! Come, we've shivered here quite long

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enough. Let's run back to the house." And with a gaiety not quite natural, she caught Lilith's hand and hurried her back to the verandaful of people. "See," —as they joined the others—"the moon is coming up—look, on this side!"

"Why do you stand with your back to it?" Maddox was asking Zona. "Trying to expiate the follies of summer flirtation?"

"I told you I'd never had any," she retorted youthfully—being just then deep in metaphysics with Winthrop, her sense of humour had evaporated with the fog. "Why you persist in bringing up those cheap, what you call normal affairs——"

"Never mind that—look!" He faced her abruptly to the water side of the veranda; they were suddenly alone in the shadow—all the rest having run to the uncovered end—and Zona was glad of it. She wanted her own emotions, uncrowded by those of the irrelevant. "It reminds me of an old saying my nurse used to repeat," she said slowly, "a blood-red moon brings death!"

Maddox wrapped her cloak closer about her—unnecessarily Zona thought. "I am glad you had a nurse—a real goblin one—and were a child," he said, stooping a little to meet her eyes. "It makes you seem so much more human."

"Oh, I'm human enough!" she laughed disagreeably. "In my abhorrences and my hobbies and my hateful feminine temper. I'm quite human."

"Are you? Well, I'm glad. I have seemed to see you as an isolated intellect, sitting on a superior mount of your own—inspired, but lonely! But if you confess to a temper, that's an encouragement."

"Why do you think of me at all?" asked Zona crossly. It was not part of her creed to be patronized,

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and by a creature whom she continually assured herself she despised.

"Shall I tell you?" He bent over her—"Because unfortunately I can't help it!"

"I'm sorry for you," she said bitingly. "Very sorry. I do all *I* can——"

"No, you don't!" The blue of his eyes made lightning through the fog. "You aggravate it."

"I—really——" Why on earth could she never find anything to say to this man? He was only a runaway reformer after all; and yet—— "I believe we came out here to look at the harbour." It was weak, but it was something!

"Did we?" asked the runaway. "I had forgotten. I see the harbour a good deal. Besides there's none to see to-night—just polka dots. But if you're restless, what do you say to an hour at the Chinese theatre?

"I—I——"

"In case you should hesitate, I had the forethought to ask Winthrop—and Mrs. Soper will come along. All her guests are leaving now."

"But you must speak to Lilith."

"Certainly. Perhaps she will come too."

But, as Zona could have told him, Lilith wouldn't. "You see I was busy all the afternoon," she said in her vague, sweet way, "and I don't like Chinese very well, and it's so hot, isn't it? So if Mrs. Soper will go with you—and Zona will be all right——"

"Oh, she'll be all right." Maddox's mouth twitched at the idea of Lilith as protectorate for Zona. "You are leaving now yourself, aren't you?"

"Yes—I hope, Mr. Wayne," she turned to the consul who had stood by silently. "I hope that I'm not keeping you from going?"

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The question would have occurred to no one in the world except Lilith. But Wayne answered with unsmiling courtesy, "I would much rather do a day's work in the office, Mrs. Armistead. That is the strongest way I know to put my non-desire. Will you wait while I see about the chairs?"

They swung down the bluff through the thick haze; patches of emptiness in the locust trees making occasional lancets of fantastic shadow. No one who lived in Hong-kong ever used the cog-road up and down the Peak. The residents were too consistent Orientals to escape the eerie sinuousness of that slim still pathway to-night. It cast its muteness over the visitors as well as over Wayne and Caro while the straggling little retinue of chairs was slung down its tar-green throat.

Last in procession came Wayne—it was his favourite place in life; because he could watch better. To-night it was Lilith's head—barely outlined for a distance, then a burnished mass of gold. The impulse to make such metamorphosis of her emotions tugged persistently at his imagination. It had been so long since he had had any really new interest. "Go 'longside," he ordered softly. And the obedient yellow feet quickened until the two chairs were parallel.

"Do you like it?" Wayne spoke gently; he would never startle her.

"Ah yes——" Lilith turned to him with much the same hushed pleasure in her voice. "It is entrancing. But I wish they would put out the lanterns. I should like it all dark so much better."

Wayne tapped the coolies in the lead, and without stopping had the narrow flames extinguished. On down the hill they circled, some one venturing speech occasionally, but dropping back invariably into silence.

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Wayne lay stretched almost full length in his long chair, and gazed obliquely through his narrowed eyes at the woman moving along beside him. The flat pad-pad of the coolies' feet, the thin wind rustling through their garments, and the soft creaking of the chairs upon the bamboo were not new things to him. But a woman sprung out of Lethe, a woman whose self-consciousness had never been taught birth, but whose eyes went from dove-gray to the green intensity of a panther's, according to contact—a woman content to have her beauty left neglected by a husband who ignored her during long weeks of money getting: here at last was the unusual.

Wayne was so taken up with the conundrum that he failed to notice when the others left them for the theatre; indeed he never came out of his trance of speculation until he found himself and her the object of it, set down at his own door.

Then he decided to begin active solution. "You aren't going up right away, are you?" he asked, following Lilith into the house. "It is a strangely interesting night; and after the coolness of the Peak you will find the veranda the only bearable place."

Lilith hesitated—which meant that she stayed down. "I'm rather tired, still——"

"I will make you very comfortable out here. Come." And he drew her through the long windows on to the veranda—feeling with some anticipation the thrill which ran along her hand.

"See, I will put your chair here by the railing, as I always have mine. Then we can look over the edge of things. Are you afraid to do that?" He sank into the seat beside her with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Afraid? Of what should I be afraid, except purgatory and the wrath of the Church? Besides,

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you are here." Nothing could be sweeter than the finality with which Lilith stated her trust; and it scored for her, since he knew she was not in the slightest degree coquette.

"Yes, I am here. And by the way, I wonder where old Jack is? He said he'd get back from Foochow before this."

"He never really knows," returned Lilith placidly. "Only in New York, where his days go by clockwork, is he sure of what he will do next. It all depends on how much money he can make by staying."

"Money! And I suppose that with you too, as with all good Americans, money is the *raison d'être*?"

"It gets me what I want," said Lilith directly.

"Are you quite sure? All you want?" His hand on her arm emphasized the question.

Lilith trembled. "What—what is that noise like scratching by the window?"

Wayne listened without moving. "Len, writing prayers to his ancestors. Tell me, are you satisfied actually with surface things—with clothes and perfect colour and—why I can hardly conceive of it! You told me you were twenty-seven, and yet you do not know the first thing of yourself. Not the first thing."

His shutting eyes bent upon her in the orange of the moonlight and marvelled at the curved scarlet of those lips, the gorgeous vivid gleam of all that hair—still unpossessed, or less than unpossessed. Armistead could not be counted.

"Haven't you the least desire to probe beneath your superficialities?" he went on a bit unsteadily. "Doesn't the fact of all you may be appeal to you at all? Think, you are Spanish—southern; not New England. Your possibilities——" As he bent nearer

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to her that pointer to his own possibilities—the yellow envelope—fell softly to the floor unnoticed.

"My possibilities are my husband and my home," she answered; not prudishly, but with a visible nervousness. "I am not like Zona, bright and widely educated and with a future. I am just an ordinary woman."

"Thank the Lord!" he supplemented with soft fervour. "Listen, Lilith." He could hear her breath coming faster with the name. "There is for the ordinary woman, who is the only woman in the world, a whole enormity of experience which makes life worth her living. You know nothing about this. Sensation with you has been confined to sound, and a few yards of silken colour. You haven't even touched the outskirts of the subjective. God! If *I* had not!" His voice faltered with a sudden, ineffable weariness. Then it took up the thread. "You are asleep—untutored; life hasn't begun to beat for you yet. But it could, at first—the beginnings of everything are simply the pulse of pleasure racing past our indolence. Let me tell you this"—he went over unconsciously to a language she could understand—"the reason you felt chilled in New England was because it's passionless—and you are not."

Lilith swayed out of her comfort, and walked swiftly to the other side of the veranda. The ego, once roused, was inclined to panic. "I think I must go in now. We have talked long enough about me."

"No——" He caught her hand as she passed. "Why do you run away from it? You might as well not, you know. It will follow you and nag at you and finally beat you, this eternal 'what am I?' Find it out now, and then—well, I suppose you will laugh at it or sneer—but find it out!"

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His fingers drew themselves slowly from her wrists up to the shoulders, and he could feel her relax, though her laces rose and fell in quick sharp leaps. "Won't you?" he insisted gently, "Won't you learn—at last?"

"I—I—ah!" Her sigh meant surrender. "*Dios!* I will learn, yes! I will learn." Her lids drooped to shut out that emerald under-flash. "I will learn. Teach me, teach me, only——"

"Hello, everybody! Where are you all, eh? Gad! what a dark house!" It was John Armistead who came stumblingly through the window.

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CHAPTER V

"HIS Excellency will have the foreign breadstuff prepared and sent up," announced Wan Ho, gliding into the kitchen with the impassive triumph of one who brings commotion. "The lord barbarian has returned, and the women are laughing."

"The fire-headed woman does not laugh," said Ping, not budging from his squat position by the low door. "The lord barbarian goes to gather gold, and leaves his woman with our most gracious master—Confucius grant him the splendour of Heaven! When the lord barbarian goes, then does his woman laugh! My cousin says——"

"Your cousin's ancestors were pigs," Len volunteered composedly. "At the joss I made my prayers to Confucius, so that no knife might come between our lord and his friend. Great is Confucius! There will no harm come!"

"Our lord demands the bread stuff," murmured Wan Ho, sitting down on a quilt beside Chan, the house-boy.

"I am about to stir my pleasure," answered Ping with dignity, "but it is not for me to clean the greens or cut the loaf. Would you have a mandarin tie the shoes of a criminal, or a scholar wash the garments of a coolie? Where is the contemptible Gu Ling that he does not shake his idleness?"

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"I am here—under the ice-cupboard, most mighty. I have just dreamt that I died and was buried with many fireworks, and the women howled and tore at their faces; but my grandfather met me at the third heaven and bore my soul from the rest-house to the temple of my ancestors. And my grandfather's father was in the coat of the prince of mandarins——"

"Was he the one who sat three days at the gate of M'Kaba with the kang about his neck, and received fifty strokes of the bamboo for stealing his neighbour's ass?" put in Chan, who as house-boy was apt to give himself airs.

"My grandfather's father was a scholar of the seventh order of learning. He was not a vendor of ill-smelling herbs, like the snake-livered Chan Min Hu, your illustrious father."

Gu Ling had come out from under the ice-cupboard, and was glowering in youthful arrogance at the haughty Chan. They looked like two cocks on the feathered cards bought by the barbarians.

"Our lord rings the devil's bell," said Wan Ho, remaining comfortably seated while he listened. "When do you prepare the bread stuff?"

"I am coming," said Gu Ling, giving a last contemptuous sniff at his superior.

"The less aged of the white women has been to Yow Lee's theatre." Wan shifted his knees and pulled down a long carved metal pipe from the collection on the shelf. "Two men of her country have brought her back to his Excellency—those who arrived by the puff-boat the day before the funeral of my wife's sister."

"The nut-haired woman is rich," said Chan, who had complacent reason to know. "If she liked she

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could wear jade and many pearls. She could have feet like golden lilies, and a servant woman on either side to lean upon."

"Barbarians do not have golden lilies," observed Ping, mixing sandwich-filling with an exact and skilful hand. "Their men do not demand that a wife shall have small feet, nor the nine virtues of Confucius' mother. The woman with eyes like dragons' tails is more beautiful than this other with quick feet and no husband."

"I have heard the wife of the heathen priest talk of these two with many barbarians"—Len spoke with the supercilious stolidity of the acknowledged oracle—"and she says the dragon woman is more beautiful, but that the other has the wisdom of a thousand spirits. I would rather have the milk-skinned one, for wisdom is not good in a woman."

"Surely your wife is not beautiful," said Chan spitefully, "and before she had a son, she beat the wife of Jin, the rice merchant, because her children were all boys."

"My wife has three sons," returned Len imperturbably. "Her tongue has cooled."

"A woman with a temper should be beaten," remarked Chan, who was engaged, and secretly anxious. "The Books of Virtues say that her house should be kept clean, and her tongue subdued to her husband's will. My Pei Tai will never fight the wife of a rice merchant."

"Hu Pei Tai is a known magpie," said Wan Ho, puffing comfortably. "If fighting would keep her tongue without the house I should say to her it is one of the nine virtues to fight!"

"You do not know what you would say!" Chan's narrow eyes blinked angrily at him. "You have no

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money to buy eels for a wife to eat. How can you tell what you would say?"

"I have money to go to America. That is better than buying eels." Wan Ho remained impassively contented in his corner. "When I buy a wife, she shall not be allowed to gossip all day at the market-house."

"Nor to make your friends happy by sitting with them by night, hai?" Ping laughed disagreeably as he spread the thin bread with sandwich-filling.

Len rose and put on his enormous brown doctor's glasses before he came leisurely over to the table. "For lies, the Taotai (Mayor) has been known to cut a man's queue," was all he said, as he passed upstairs.

But Ping trembled. The Taotai had married Len's sister-in-law's sister. And Len dogged the consul only less faithfully than he dogged Confucius.

Ping spilt some salt and spoke sharply to Gu Ling. "Spirits of a thousand monkeys! Can you not grease some haste into your toes, snail-boy? The bread stuff has been waiting these seven ages. Your soul will never get beyond the third heaven unless——"

"I am ready, gracious lord. Have mercy, I am ready." Gu Ling's small brown hands shook fearfully as he placed his brimming iced jug on the tray for Wan Ho.

The bell rang again. Impatiently. Wan Ho hung up his pipe with an air of unalloyed injury, and shook his queue into position. "Our most gracious master stops drinking only to drink again," he murmured, receiving the tray from Gu Ling's anxious fingers. "I am about to pull the punkah rope in the east hall. I shall watch the barbarians unless I sleep."

"You had better pull the punkah rope of the ser-

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vant barbarian," Ping called after him. "She it is who can read the devil writing of the women, and she has learned some mandarin talk. Ask her——" But Wan Ho had vanished up the dark stairway.

The room above into which he stepped was in need of the punkah's fitful breeze—in need of anything to dissolve its electricity. The consul sat upright—a phenomenon in itself disconcerting—and he talked less slowly than usual to the husband of his guest. The guest herself was white to an extremity of pallor. She leaned back very quiet listening to the men who sat on either side of her. Wan Ho put down the great brass tray on the table, taking furtive inventory of the nut-haired girl, who stood in the window disputing with a barbarian as tall as the Pink Pagoda itself; and of the wife of the heathen priest, whose eyes slanted at the whole room from the oblique distance of Wan Ho's eyes themselves. The Oriental glanced at her with the silent understanding of a fellow spectator, looking on at the absurd manœuvres of creatures who will never learn—the something they two knew.

As the soft servant-feet retreated past a noiseless-shutting door Caro shivered imperceptibly. "What do you think of them by this time?" she asked John Armistead—very lightly.

"Can't stand 'em," he replied with a brutal promptness. "Honestly, Mrs. Soper, sometimes up there in the interior I thought I'd just have to cut and run, that was all; not another Christian for five hundred miles around—except Jarvis and the interpreter, and he's half yellow, I believe on my soul! Why, Randy——"

"Have a drink, Jack, do!" Wayne's long fingers poured a shade less indolently than usual. "At

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least you've found out that Hong-kong is worth coming back to."

"Yaeh"—Armistead sipped his claret luxuriously—"spite of the welcome I got! Came in here, y' know"—he turned again to Caro—"house all dark, not a whisper stirring anywhere, no sound o' those lazy yellow patter-feet even; and by Godfrey, if I didn't have to break my neck across the window before they even heard me!" Caro's eyes under their screening lashes shifted quickly to Lilith; but Lilith was absorbed in a drop of claret she had just spilled on her mantilla. "Yes, sir, there they were on that steaming veranda, Randy and Lil, sitting as still as two mummies. Gad! I tell you this climate's ruinous. What d'you think about it, Lil?"

Lilith looked up at him slowly. "I am very comfortable here," she said, puzzling Caro again by the clear gray of her eyes. "It seems like home."

"Mrs. Armistead is one of those rare people who haven't yet bored themselves," suggested Wayne, drawing his contemplation unhurriedly from Lilith's arms to her husband's stubborn jaw. "She will never have to take up anything as a palliation of monotony."

"Oh, monotony suits Lil all right," agreed Armistead easily, coming in on the first point he understood. "Give Lil a cool couch with fifty or so cushions, and she'll be satisfied till Judgment Day. Isn't that so, Lil?"

"I do like cushions," murmured Lilith.

"Do you?" Roger Maddox asked Zona, from their isolation in the window.

"No, I detest them. Particularly those of one's own making—those that were meant to have been hard useful boards!"

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"If you begin to get metaphorical I shall have to turn you over to Winthrop, and"—his eyes fired into hers with obstinate, humorous intensity—"I don't mean to do that."

"Do you think you have any right to say what you mean to do with me?" Zona was furious with herself for showing fury.

"Oh, yes!" Once more that maddening, confident smile of proprietorship. "I am your discoverer, you know. I'm bringing you out."

"Oh, so that's what you're doing. It must tax your powers of evolution considerably." She had never felt so young, or so incompetent. If only Winthrop were there! Invariably he reassured her self-misgiving. But he had had an engagement at the club—an appointment with some archaeologist to discuss scarabs.

"Haven't you had enough of failure?" she asked unkindly.

"I undertake it now from an unselfish standpoint," he said cheerfully—although his blue eyes had turned suddenly to fixed meditation on Wayne's Canton vases. "Really you know when I think that without us, without the failures, there'd be no politics nor any bosses—no fame at all, in fact, I get quite chesty; I do indeed. When you look at it that way, you can't expect a conscientious person to throw up the rôle."

"The papers called you other things than conscientious—and on the boat you said that you had given up everything that had to do with politics and bosses—and activity." Her lip curled.

"Activity in general——" The man's splendid teeth gleamed indomitably friendly; Zona decided angrily that he must be made of indiarubber. "Now

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I'm taking up the individual, you see, and you are my one hope of a belated success."

"A very slim hope, I should say," and she said it with distinct severity.

"Oh, not too slim! Just—just about right, I think."

"Mr. Maddox!"

Mr. Maddox raised two guiltless obedient eyes. "You were about to say?"

"Oh, there's no use talking to you! You can't understand when you are being humiliated."

"Can't I?" His face hardened into an age with which Zona was unfamiliar. "Can't I understand? Do you think I watched the municipal returns come in, back there in Chicago last spring, and didn't understand? I'm not out here for—for—my health, Miss Raimund."

The girl looked at him with that first explosive pity which undermines so many women's well meant antagonism. "You—you made a very brave fight," she conceded. "I—why—why *didn't* you stay and make it again?"

He met her eager, disappointed glance curiously. "Do you really care as much as that?" he asked.

"Of course I care! Not because it was you, but because you were a man, an American, fighting on a losing side which ought somehow to have won. Because it nearly did win—so nearly that another year of your captainship, your energy, your brains, would have forced a victory. And instead, you ran away! Oh, why, why did you do it?"

Maddox's lips tightened stubbornly. "Some day I hope to teach you the interest of the specific over the general. Then I'll tell you why I did it. Will you come and look at the moon? It's going down."

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Zona stamped her foot. "No, I won't look at the moon," she flashed. 'I have had one more proof that I'm never such a fool as when I believe myself mistaken!"

"Say, Zona," John Armistead's good-humoured voice came persuasively across the room. "Look in my biggest bag like a good girl, and get out those bundles—I always bring the girls just a little something," he explained to Caro with an apology that was half pathetic. "Lil's got a lot of truck at home now, doesn't know what to do with half of it. But somehow I'm so soft I can't keep myself from buying her more. Besides, if you can't enjoy your money——"

"Exactly," said Caro with a smile that made Armistead tell himself surprisedly that she was a very pretty woman. He had always preferred blondes. Looking over at his wife's gold hair, in which flame seemed to curl up and then vanish away, he decided that one would call Lil "out and out handsome." Still——

"Is this what you meant, Cousin John?" Zona and Maddox came back from the hall, carrying a large roll of something—it looked like native cloth.

"That's it—I got 'em at Nanking. Here, Randy, just help me open 'em. The dress is for Zona and the coat for Lil—pretty, ain't they?"

Caro Soper often thought afterwards of the tableau: Armistead on his knees, flushed and delighted as he spread his gifts out for appreciation; Zona alert and for once wholly feminine in her eagerness, which in turn lent eagerness to Maddox; Randal Wayne half stooping from his tall impersonality to bend his eyes—what one could see of them—on Lilith, who stood waiting, round-eyed, a little breathless, as the heavy roll of silk unwound under John Armistead's

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short fingers. Then a sharp "Aih!" that was a half sob, a soft rush that brought her abject at his feet an odd little cry, part reverence, part ecstasy—and Lilith caught the mass of satin from her husband's hands.

"It is mine—it is mine—say it is!" Her speech came in quick imperative leaps, such as seemed to make of her a different individual from that impassive woman who had sat a little while ago at dinner, dignified after the manner of a past age. Her skin, which had been polished ivory, was flooded with a vivid rose, the delicate folds of her gown fluttered, some of them she even tore as she knelt unheeding—abandoned, like a priestess before her altar. "Give it to me—give it to me," she begged, crushing up the gorgeous stuff to her face. "Ah—*Dios*!"

It was the same low, thrilling exclamation she had made an hour ago—an hour ago, Randal Wayne reflected, with the first emotion he had known for a long time—and now over a square of satin, a piece of stuff! True, when she held it up that way against her face, the undulating yellow almost seemed a living thing.

"Try it on, why don't you?" Armistead suggested uncomfortably. "Of course it's yours; you can have twenty if you want 'em. There!" as she kissed his hands extravagantly. "Try it on. Why, Zona doesn't make half the fuss."

"I haven't had the chance," said Zona sententiously. "But it is beautiful—beautiful!" Characteristically she held the brilliant blue robe far from her, so that its magnificence lent her personally no further attraction.

But Lilith had slipped into hers, sank into it rather, with a soft sigh of infinite pleasure; and at once it

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seemed to wind about and grow a part of her, as the supple satin sleeves caressed and hid her arms and the long opalescent dragons' tails swirled out about her feet and then recoiled—to twine themselves anew up around her swaying slenderness. "God of my soul! is it not wonderful? See"—she caught Caro's arm—"how the gray green of their claws shades into violet where they clutch the orange—ah, it is mine—mine! It was made for me."

"'*Tis* darned becomin' to her, isn't it?" Armistead took a long gulp of claret as he stared at her strange loveliness. "I guess Jarvis was about right when he said that was the one that'd suit her—Jarvis picked 'em out, y' know," he told Lilith unapologetically.

Wayne, watching her, decided that she could not have heard—or rather that she had nothing with which to hear—the language of implication. It was enough for her to possess—exquisite glowing things whose contact brought the same thrill to her voice that he had brought there; whose provider she regarded with an almost servile gratitude. Somewhere, underneath that crust of unrealization, must slumber a volcano more than humanly tempestuous; he had held the spark of ignition very close. Would the explosion bore him, after all? It was the caution of ingrown passivity that asked the question. To answer it came a curious contentment—a sort of delicate detached conceit—in the knowledge that he was the only one in the world who could bore himself in that way; the only one who knew the analysis of the smouldering eyes, and could by the mere brushing of glances (the subtlest form of contact) sweep aside their lava to uncover emerald fire.

"Do you like green?" he asked Caro seriously.

"Drinks or sunshades, do you mean?" Her cool

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voice added to itself unusual flippancy—the spider expression (as she was beginning to call it) spoiled something in Randal for her. It must be routed perseveringly, she determined. "Rollo is quite foolish over it for helmets."

"Where is Rolly?" Wayne looked about inquiringly, as though suddenly aware of Mr. Soper's absence.

"He went to the Sailors' Mission." Caro's smile was a little weary. "He is probably home by this time, and hunting some supper. I must go and look after him." It was Zona who noticed that Mrs. Soper mentioned her husband generally as one who must be taken care of. "An unconscionable hour, no doubt—isn't it?" She turned to Wayne. "We left the theatre after twelve."

"Just half-past one," said Armistead, going over to the window, where he stood looking out at the moon-ambered garden. "Gad! there's actually a bit of wind coming up! Hello! what's that?"

Something had blown at his feet—a piece of yellow paper. "Nothing important, I suppose." Yet he picked it up after the carefulness of the successful business man. "'Organizing Consular Bureau. Headquarters Washington. Want you——' I beg pardon, Randy, you must excuse me, old man." Honest John Armistead's face crimsoned with embarrassment. "But why the dickens do you leave official documents where they can blow all over the place?" he blurted out irritably. "Anybody might have found this thing—on the street—and read the whole business."

"Yes," said Wayne serenely, pocketing the paper. "So they might. It would amuse them." His whimsical smile drew back all Caro's liking, while Armistead and Zona it aggravated beyond measure.

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The sympathy of climate separated itself very distinctly in that room, just then; and for a moment the two divisions regarded each other, each with characteristic defiance. In John Armistead and Zona it appeared unmasked, downright, so pugnacious as to catch a shade of humour—which only Maddox saw; in the other two, Caro and Wayne, the feeling pushed itself obliquely, with a tenacity so muted that it scarcely spoke at all—yet spoke with the persistence of ten thousand years. While over in a corner with her brocades Lilith sat, all unperceiving—"as though she were in a jewelled jail," Randal thought half enviously, "with everything she wants or knows about inside."

And he crossed to let her out, almost eagerly. "Mrs. Soper is leaving," he told her, contriving, as they went out behind the others, to let his fingers rest an instant on hers—hanging half-hidden in the great mandarin sleeves of the new treasure. And through the darkness of the veranda there flashed to him the instant fascination of that vanishing green light.

When Caro and Maddox had gone, it occurred to Zona—with an innocent suddenness—that it was very late, and that she had an early engagement with Winthrop. "I must go up," she murmured. "Oh! do you go away soon again, Cousin John?" She had never taken any great satisfaction in Armistead's presence, yet recently, since she had come to live at the Consulate, she had wished with vague uneasiness that he were not to be away so much. In this atmosphere of shifting certainties he was so sure, so unchanging—those very qualities of his which before had irritated her were beginning to show themselves virtues.

"I have to go to Kienkiang on Monday," he replied regretfully. The world of tinkling glasses and pretty women and cool white garments was very alluring,

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in contrast with two weeks of toil and ill-smelling food at 110 in the shade! "Jingo! Wish all I had to do was to sit around and drink ice like you people!"

"Jack talks as if he had to make some money," said Lilith, from the veranda rail (where earlier in the evening she had just begun to look over the edge of things). "Haven't we enough to live on for a while?"

Armistead winked delightedly at Wayne. "Oh, I reckon we could get along," he chuckled. "You might not get that forty horse-power car you were talking about for next winter, or those new sables, but—well, I think we'd manage."

"Then why do you go and make yourself all hot and uncomfortable just for the sake of more money?"

"Because if I didn't some one else would," returned her husband, "and I couldn't stand that. But you and Zona seem pretty well fixed here——"

"Mr. Wayne has been thoughtfulness itself." Lilith's eyes wavered the tiniest bit.

"Perfect," confirmed Zona mechanically from the window.

"So I don't see why you shouldn't keep fairly well contented for another month or two, eh, Wayne?" Armistead looked across at the consul, leaning attentively by one of the great white pillars.

"I hope they will be willing to content me for much longer than that." Wayne's glance strayed involuntarily to the low swinging double chair. "You see, the countess likes them, and Mr. Jenks likes them, and Violet and Eunice fairly trip each other up in liking them. If they'll only stay long enough, I'm promising myself a long-deferred popularity with the whole colony."

"Oh, they'll stay all right," laughed Armistead genially, "unless"—his thick brows bent on Randal

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sharply—" you should miraculously get some sense into your head, and go home to run that Bureau—what ? "

" Good-night ! " Zona spoke abruptly, as she gathered up her blue robe. She had no more patience that night for the consul's paradoxes. " Are you coming, Lilith ? "

The two men fell into opposite chairs with a relieved slump of comfort. " Nice little woman, Mrs. Soper," offered Armistead, after a few minutes' silence. " Has funny sort of eyes, hasn't she ? I rather like 'em."

" They're Chinese eyes," said the consul slowly. " Sometimes, in spite of their English roundness, I almost think they are Chinese. The natives treat her so like one of them—and that's a very rare proof of sympathy."

" God bless my soul ! Why the devil couldn't you have told me before ? Here I ran 'em down to her for all I was worth ! Just the same I'll bet her pink-cheeked little parson doesn't cotton to her takin' up with the sly rascals. How'd he come to marry her, anyway ? "

" She married him " (Wayne's reversal of the subject passed Armistead unnoticed) " solely as a means of transportation. She wanted to get back to China—and he was the only person she knew who could give her what she wanted. I suppose "—he poured himself out a drink unhurriedly—" that is what most women marry for : to get the incidentals that only some other creature—some man—can bring them."

" My word, Randy, but you're a gloomy one ! " Armistead was walking up and down whistling. " S'pose I took to that notion about Lil ? Who'd be a bigger fool than I, eh ? "

" Mrs. Armistead can hardly be generalized." Wayne lit another cigarette with careful precision. " She is quite different from any one I ever saw."

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"Isn't she now?" Armistead's voice held that eager interest with which he always mentioned his possessions. "A relief from the nagging, everlastingly dissatisfied kind, you know!"

"She is a relief." The consul's cigarette showed his eyes drawn to slits as thin as Wan Ho's. "She is the first woman I ever saw, Jack, who didn't cease being a woman when she became a wife." Wayne knew that he was talking Sanskrit to the financier, but he took a capricious pleasure in hearing himself talk it. "She is just as she's always been, accentuated—a beautiful strangely dormant sort of creature, soaking her colossal powers of sensation in mere trifles: clothes—music—the Church—though that is rather bigger."

"Yes"—Armistead hastened to agree where he could comprehend—"what the priest says, goes, with Lil, all right. And yet she's never bothered me about religion; not once."

"She wouldn't bother you! It isn't in her to bother anybody. She is the only consistently impersonal egoist in existence, I believe. I have watched her here for two weeks and never yet has she betrayed the glimmer of an interest in any one's affairs but her own. Moreover she doesn't, as you say, bore one with her own."

"No—she's a good girl, Lil is. I knew what I was doing when I married her, all right." John Armistead was drawing large puffs of self-satisfaction.

"I wonder if you did? I wonder if any of us know anything at all about her?"

Armistead laughed. "Why, sure we do. You're a little upset by all this modern psychological stuff, Randy—that's all. Lil's as easy reading as the daily paper; no unsuspected curves about her, thank God. If she was like some women! But she isn't. I saw to that before I married her. I——"

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"How long have you been married?" Wayne blew the question lightly across the veranda.

"Eight years next October. Eight years!—and Lil's only twenty-seven. Think of that!"

"Twenty-seven years of lethargy is preparation enough for anybody." The consul was talking half to himself. "Did you say you must be off again on Monday, Jack?"

"Yes, worse luck! I've two more of these fiendish interior trips to take with Jarvis before we can fix up any contract. Say, Randy, it's almighty good of you to keep the girls, you know!"

"It's good to me," corrected Wayne.

"Lil's not so hard to please," Armistead went on. "But Zona—well, I never did understand the girl. She's so damned clever."

"She seems to be amusing herself agreeably enough."

"You mean Maddox?" Armistead prided himself on his keen landing of the subtle ball. "Well, I hope she decides to take him. I do indeed. A girl like that ought to be married."

"I'm afraid she wouldn't duplicate Mrs. Armistead's success," said Wayne, rising. "She's been awake since before she was born, and some man is going to have to face the accumulated tempest. I agree with Len that a woman's mind should be as bare as an egg-shell. In fact, she shouldn't have any. Going up, Jack?"

"Uh-huh," said Jack, who had contemplated nothing of the sort. "Guess I'd better see what Lil's doing."

As it was three o'clock in the morning, this idea might have been called somewhat superfluous; but Wayne received it with entire seriousness.

"I think," he said, "you'll find her sleeping. Good-night."

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CHAPTER VI

"I'M sure I think Mr. Wayne's quite right." Mrs. Twinehurst set down her tea-cup with a conclusive rattle of approbation. "This may not be heaven, of course (she looked about the Peak tennis ground plaintively); certainly the climate's shocking!—but then, my dear, what one hears about that extraordinary America—really!"

"Of course, in the first place he came out from America." Mrs. Levering held the cream-jug poised doubtfully. She it was who had conceived the novel idea of having tea at the tennis grounds, under an enormous Chinese umbrella.

"I have forgotten it long ago," pronounced her friend magnanimously. "He is everything a gentleman could be. When he enters a room one feels simply taken up with him. Quite like my own dear Harry—you remember your Uncle Harry, Violet?"

"Yes, I remember him." Violet turned from Winthrop to admit the fact with a lengthening face. "I never thought him the least like Mr. Wayne." (Violet had been enjoying her monologue on the view.)

Mrs. Twinehurst stiffened. "I am afraid you played tennis a bit too long, dear," she said sweetly. "You are always a trifle difficult when you overexercise. Never mind now"—as Violet started to reply—"go on talking with Mr. Winthrop. Most at-

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tentive," she whispered dynamically to Mrs. Levering. "He had three waltzes with her last night! I really think, dearest"—the whisper deepened to a wistful growl—"if it weren't for that Zona Raimund, I might get Violet off at last."

"Violet is very sweet," said the friend discreetly.

"She is," agreed her aunt, raising her voice in the direction of Winthrop. "Violet is more than sweet. She has principle; poise, common-sense; just the things a man finds most attractive in a wife. But, oh yes, dear, you were saying—about Mr. Wayne——"

"The countess knows more than I do." At the same time Mrs. Levering's pretty hands gathered importance as she poured out tea. "She was at Caro's the night it all came up—when Mr. Armistead made the scene, you know."

"Did he make a scene?" Mrs. Twinehurst sat forward till her stiff white bodice creaked with interest, "I said from the first he was an inferior creature—all those dollars for one thing——"

"Well, it wasn't exactly a scene perhaps, but he—the countess said they were sitting perfectly quiet, the whole table, and all of a sudden Mr. Armistead fairly shouted out: 'So you're really going back to America, Randy—well, I'm glad you've learned sense at last.' Of course, every one was too amazed for words ——"

"Of course!"

"And before poor Mr. Wayne could say a thing they all began to ask questions—whether he had been recalled, and why, and where he was going—and Mr. Armistead answered everybody (the most awful taste, wasn't it, Maria?) without giving the consul a chance to say a word, and told them all that he was going home to take charge of a new Bureau, a very respon-

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sible post, for which nobody would do in the least except Mr. Wayne."

"That part of it is probably quite true." Mrs. Twinehurst took one of the Trading Company's biscuits, and began to munch loyally. "I understand they have so few *competent* men in America like Mr. Wayne—most of them are like that dreadful Higgins who was here before—you remember, Barbara, how continually he—er—expectorated? And sitting there all the time in that frightful office! Not one bit like Mr. Wayne; he has time for every one—such a *nice* man!"

"The countess said he was perfect. He didn't think of contradicting Mr. Armistead, or calling him an interfering bounder, as so many men would have done; he simply smiled—that wonderful, appealing smile, you know, Maria (Mrs. Levering herself knew, or had known, too well, poor thing) and said that his friend judged much too kindly of his ability."

"And was that all?" The large crumb on Mrs. Twinehurst's upper lip quivered disappointment.

"Yes, except that when the countess asked Caro about it afterwards, she said that Mr. Armistead was only trying to call a bluff on Mr. Wayne—to make him decide. Now whatever is 'calling a bluff,' Maria?"

"I haven't the least idea," returned Maria, with one eye on Violet's shy machinations. "Perhaps it's an—er—Indian expression. But did it make Mr. Wayne decide?"

"That's just what no one knows! All he said was, as I told you, that his friend was too kind; and then yesterday at the club when Tom asked him, he said he should be most uncomfortable away from here, that Hong-kong had grown to be his birthplace. Such a quaint idea!"

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"Isn't it! But he doesn't say whether he's going or not—and that's so important. See, dear, here are Miss Raimund and Caro just coming in. I'll ask Caro."

"Oh, I should never speak to Caro," put in Mrs. Levering hastily.

"My dear, *I* am afraid of nobody. Besides, Miss Raimund may have told her something; girls always tell—ah, good-afternoon, Caro! Yes, isn't it?—shocking hot! Mr. Wayne ought really to be glad to get away from such a spot, oughtn't he?" With which enormous subtlety Mrs. Twinehurst could not withstand a victorious flash of the eye at Mrs. Levering.

"Is he getting away from it?" asked Caro, her mouth curling like her eyes, as she passed on to Violet and Winthrop.

"She knows!" exploded Mrs. Twinehurst to Mrs. Levering. "Simply stingy about it, my dear, that's all! Ah, Miss Raimund! So nice to see you again—and looking perfectly blooming, isn't she, Barbara? Have you been playing tennis, my dear?" This was obviously seized upon, as Zona had her racquet in her hand, and her hair rather far down her back.

"We tried to——" Zona's voice was not without irritation; at the same time she looked exceedingly pretty, with her short white frock and vivid colouring, against the trains and listlessness of the rest of Hong-kong. "We tried to—Mr. Jenks and I—but Mr. Maddox wanted a game, and then Miss Lorrilard—the blue one—oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Twinehurst, but really you know that's the way I always think of them. I mean, that is—blue suits Violet so well, doesn't it?"

"It is Eunice who wears blue," said Mrs. Twinehurst majestically.

"Oh, to be sure. Well, she's coming right along—

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with Lilith and Mr. Wayne. (A large glance of anticipation bolted from Mrs. Twinehurst to Mrs. Levering.) I do think it was such a splendid idea of yours, Mrs. Levering, to give tea at the tennis grounds—I'm always starving after, and it's so much cooler up here on the Peak than down at the Consulate." When Zona smiled that way, Mrs. Levering did not blame Maria for feeling anxious; if *she* were Winthrop, she reflected, looking into the girl's frank hazel eyes affectionately——

"But where did you leave Mr. Maddox?" she wondered suddenly.

"Such an exemplary young man," murmured Mrs. Twinehurst, who thought him "just the man" for Zona.

"He's cooling off somewhere," returned Zona indifferently. "He is so stubborn about everything, he wears himself out."

"Did he beat?" asked Mrs. Levering tactlessly.

"Oh yes, he beat—two love sets. Excuse me—I want to ask Mr. Winthrop about something." And picking up her tea and a few biscuits, Zona walked over directly to where Winthrop was sitting in patient endurance of Violet's attitudes.

Mrs. Twinehurst gasped. "Barbara Levering, did you ever see anything as bald as that in your life? She didn't even pretend to speak to some one on the way!"

"She wanted to speak to Mr. Winthrop." Barbara was aggravatingly simple. "I suppose she didn't see any reason for bothering with some one she didn't want to speak to."

"Oh well, it doesn't matter." Mrs. Twinehurst lost her nascent pettishness in a quick glimpse of two tall figures coming across the lawn. "I daresay she'll get

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him—an orphan and with all that money—unchaperoned girls have such an advantage, anyhow, with er—those Bohemian men; and Mrs. Armistead leaves them quite alone. Now, Barbara"—this with an impressive inclination of the head—"when Mrs. Armistead and the consul get here, do keep natural—we'll talk about the earthquake last night, or cricket—anything easy and sympathetic, you know—and then gradually we can lead up to the news. Only you *must* be natural. When I tried to sound Caro, you were so nervous that of course she suspected something. You spoiled the whole thing."

"Oh!" said Barbara, blankly.

"Yes. Now just ask them perfectly calmly if they'll have tea, and then I'll do the rest. If only we could get hold of the countess! She's always as far away as possible from where one wants her! Hush! here they are—did you ever *see* such a heavenly gown?"

It was being trailed slowly across to the huge umbrella under which the colony sat at tea—a delicious unexpected after-treat, whose donor knew quite well all that she was giving. The wearing of a frock with Lilith came as the most elaborate and convincing rite of a religion, by which no one who witnessed it had ever failed to be impressed.

"You see, I did my very best for you!" Wayne shook hands with Mrs. Levering, without taking his eyes from his guest. "I not only brought myself, but some one much more effective. We were determined that your party should succeed, in spite of the earthquake." (Volcanic nod from Mrs. Twinehurst to Mrs. Levering, which being interpreted read: "Here's your cue!")

"Wa—wasn't it a *frightful* earthquake?" followed Mrs. Levering—most extraordinarily natural.

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"It made me very ill," said Lilith, surrendering her parasol to Wayne, with fingers that trembled imperceptibly as they brushed his. "I have never been in an earthquake before."

"And coming in the night and all, poor thing," cooed Mrs. Twinehurst, "sympathetically"; "why, it must have terrified you."

"With her husband away too," added Mrs. Levering, clinging to the "easy" subject desperately. "Were you alone?"

"No." Lilith's eyes lengthened as their smoke lifted. "No, I was not alone. How pretty it is here under this umbrella!" She sank down into the nearest chair with a grace that made the other women stare.

"W-won't you have tea?" Mrs. Levering put the final prelude with a manner that was perfectly calm—and nothing else.

Lilith looked inquiringly at Wayne. "We've just had lemon squash," he answered. "I believe we had rather just sit, Mrs. Levering." He smiled at her—utterly forgetful of the time when the wonderful appealing smile had been hers entirely.

Mrs. Levering resigned the teapot with a little thump—to denote exit on her part. Maria's was the prompter's book from now on.

"We hear you're going to treat us all most shabbily, Mr. Wayne." Maria would have swooned had she been accused of "calling a bluff"! "Is it really true that you're leaving the colony so very soon?"

This time Wayne smiled at Mrs. Twinehurst—the very same smile. "Who knows?" he said, caressing the tassel of Lilith's sun-shade. "Who ever does know? Not I, I am sure. As a resident I'm rather ingrown."

"Then you aren't going back to America?" Mrs.

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Twinehurst was already gathering up her skirts preparatory to spreading the negative.

"Mrs. Armistead's husband says I am." His eyes, that were seldom more than half open, focussed on Lilith enigmatically.

"He wants to make you," said Lilith directly.

"That's perfectly absurd!" Mrs. Levering's voice grew a little shrill with resentment. "No man in the world has the right to make another man—unless of course you want to go," she added wistfully. There never was a Randal Wayne on earth for whom women would not add that wistful clause, and add it with pathetic eagerness.

"Sometimes I want to go," he mused, while his long slender hand closed tightly over the parasol tassel. "Things which are rather necessary to me—or at least interesting—belong there."

"Your family is in America," suggested Lilith, with an inflection whose stateliness would hardly have fitted the family of Mrs. Levering (whose husband was in Tea) or Mrs. Twinehurst (whose brother was with the Trading Company).

"Of course!" Mrs. Twinehurst's mild roar evaporated into a hurried titter of suspense—perhaps, after all, Mr. Wayne was too much of a diplomat. "Now I think of it, it's very odd—but do you know"—she turned to him with dimples caving generously—"as long as we have known you—and that must be nine years, mustn't it, Barbara?—I don't remember ever to have heard you mention any of your family. Now that is odd, isn't it, since you have one!"

Wayne laughed musically—with that same contagion that catches up and attracts invariably, where there is only negative desire to attract. "In Hong-kong families are so often unpossessed," he explained to

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Lilith, whose eyes had rounded with the only surprise she ever expressed. "Nearly every one is out here to forget theirs, or to be forgotten. Wrinkles and I belong to the latter class, of course."

"You are a Wayne of Alabama," said Lilith, in a tone which to the Englishwomen conjured up at least three country houses, and perhaps a cousin in the peerage. "Wrinkles"—she took the dog into her arms with a delicious new shyness (and, Wayne noted subconsciously, a new disregard for her gown)—"I think Wrinkles must be a Wayne too." And for the first time Randal heard her laugh—girlishly—at her own little joke; probably the very first product of her twenty-seven-year-old imagination.

"But really, Mr. Wayne, about this family you're returning to"—Mrs. Twinehurst came back to her mutton with dauntless persistence—"or aren't returning to—which is it?"

"There'd be an appalling lot to return to," pondered Wayne, mostly to himself: "an uncle—a sort of head uncle, you know—and three or four under uncles—there were four, I believe; and a grandmother and a grandmother's cousin, and er—seven aunts unmarried"—apologetically—"besides those who belong to the four under uncles. Then there's a sister and a nephew, a really delightful person—I knew him rather better than the rest—and, some one told me, thirty-five first cousins; I never got as far as those."

"Good gracious, I should hope not!" Mrs. Twinehurst looked quite wilted with following. "Why, the countess has only twenty-two, and she puts on a tremendous lot of side about it. Oh! Um-m—yes, dear," as a great deal of untethered lilac mull came round her chair from the rear. "I was just saying what a wonderful family connexion you had. We're

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teasing Mr. Wayne a little about deserting us for his."

"You go then, is it?" wheezed from some portion of the mauve indefinite—the countess would not give up her asthma, even at 110 in the shade. The Emperor had had it for a favourite malady, these thirty years! "Ah, well, I haf tought you vill go. I tell Meester Jenks this place is not so good for you—no? And Meeses Zoper—I say to her already last year, he is one zose offeshals vill promote! Zair are so few, *hein*?" A very kindly smile was started at least from out the mountain of mauve; for the countess, in spite of being cousin to an archduke, was only another Mrs. Levering when it came to the consul. "Sure, yes, you get promoted."

"Promoted!" The consul himself smiled strangely. "What antithetical things we mean by even a half-dozen letters! Now my idea of promotion is to remain perfectly still."

"In your place I should say the very same thing"—Roger Maddox's friendly voice came underneath the gay umbrella with a pleasant lilt of carelessness—"and it's exactly what I mean to do," he added, sitting down between Lilith and Mrs. Levering, with flattering satisfaction.

"Miss Raimund is over there with Violet," hinted Mrs. Twinehurst delicately; she had no idea of being turned aside from "finding out"—in fact, it was becoming almost an obsession with her.

"Then I am sure she is having a most enjoyable tea," returned Mr. Maddox with prompt civility. "And I'm glad of that—she was in rather a temper when we parted. Two love sets, you know—and—er——" he looked about cautiously—"not a Bealls Wright for a partner!"

"Do you play tennis ever in America?" asked Mrs.

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Twinehurst intelligently, nudging Barbara aside for assistance.

"One has to learn somewhere," acknowledged Roger soberly. "Didn't you, Wayne?"

"Oh, Mr. Wayne *never* plays," put in Mrs. Levering eagerly. "Shall you take it up again?" She dared not look at Maria while they waited—breathless.

"Not if it keeps on like this surely." The consul gazed at the dipping sun with a mild antagonism; then he unfurled Lilith's parasol. "It's beginning to go down, at any rate. I think we might venture ourselves under it long enough to get home."

"Yes." Lilith rose so instantly as to suggest again those dancing slaves whose image she recalled to Caro. "Zona will come later when she has had some more of those games, I suppose." She turned to Mrs. Levering. "Your hospitality has been most gracious. When you can find one of your precious moments to come and see me, I shall be so honoured." The quaintness of any one's moment being more precious than boresome (to himself) in Hong-kong, occurred to no one but Maddox. He watched with some amusement while Mrs. Levering hunted a reply, and Mrs. Twinehurst did all but cling to Wayne's coat-tails in the desperation of her thwarted curiosity. "Then you're really going?" she flung after him, with a last attempt at playfulness.

"I'm sorry—but we dine at seven, you see." His face, as he looked back, revealed only a great guilelessness.

Mrs. Twinehurst stamped her ample foot as she was compelled to watch his receding tallness. "I told Barbara this afternoon that I thought him an extraordinarily clever American," she said crushingly to Maddox, "but it's evident I was mistaken—why, half

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the time he doesn't seem to know what one is talking about!"

"Which shows how subtly correct your tribute to him was," Maddox's blue eyes flashed their magnetic appreciation on her ungrudgingly. "Did you say you wanted Miss Violet?" he asked ultra-innocent. "Excuse me, I'll just fetch her for you!" And before she had time to remember why it was she wanted Violet, or to remember still further that she didn't want her, he was off across the lawn.

"Such a determined man!" she gasped to Barbara—and the countess. "So impulsive—not a bit like Mr. Winthrop, who takes time to consider."

"Nor like Mr. Wayne, who won't tell you what he has considered," retorted Barbara, rather spitefully. This time she meant that Maria should know that she had *not* spoiled everything!

"Meester Wayne is vair' amiable," said the countess, rising in billows. "Of course, he vill not tell a voman noding—I haf lived at court, I tell you. I know. No man which is not a fool tells a voman something—less he is tipsy." And she sailed off after Mr. Jenks like an overgrown comet.

"Coming, Frau Gräfin." Mr. Jenks scrambled up from his place beside Violet, wearing almost more grass stains than white flannels. "It is getting latish, don't you know!" he hinted wistfully to the others.

"So it is." Zona rose regretfully from her place next to Winthrop. "Sorry I must say good-bye to you here," she informed Maddox, who had taken up her racquet with arrogant intention. "I'm going to walk down."

"You mustn't. I'm going to walk too. I've a new conversation all thought out—one that you've never heard."

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"You're so droll!" Violet gurgled over his hand. "Isn't he, Miss Raimund?"

"Is that what one is when one isn't intelligent?" Zona sniffed youthfully.

"Oh no!" The Pink One's ribbons fluttered distress.

"Then I'm disappointed. I thought I had found something to call it. At nine then, Mr. Winthrop." Miss Raimund swept down the walk, apparently oblivious of anything at her side.

"Made up your mind to take it?" The voice of oblivion projected itself cordially upon the cooling ether. "In that line you could hardly do better, you know."

Zona regarded him from under a forest of black eyelashes. "Why is it that men can never be personal without becoming coarse?" she inquired—of the pepper trees, and Mrs. Levering's back fence.

"Shows the equilibrium of their mentality," Maddox grinned. "I'm in a far safer condition than you, for instance, who must some day swing as far below level as you're now up in the air."

"Up in the air?" Miss Raimund repeated, for once with more curiosity than antagonism.

"Exactly. To all appearances you live at the Consulate, and eat an occasional bit of meat and potato; but actually you are dwelling in some rarefied psychic Utopia, and feeding on subtleties and evanescence. All very well for now, I suppose, but hardly practical diet for—well, when you come to get married, for instance."

"I shall never marry, unless I find some one whose ideas are congenial with mine." She wished ardently that it did not sound so flat when spoken—this decision.

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"Your ideas will soon cease to be congenial to you—if you marry more of them. On the face of it now"—the blue fire of his eyes bent above her humorously—"adding on more of what you like all the time is bound to make you dislike it violently. My philosophy is, if you're fond of jam, try an olive—an acquired taste; and it works out just as prettily when applied to lawyers and doctors and merchants and chiefs. Now you want to get married——"

"I don't. I only said——"

"Oh, do allow something for argument! Pretend you want to, anyway."

"Very well!" Miss Raimund's resignation was really beautiful.

"Then if you're partial to the ethereal-minded, take an uncompromising realist. If——" He looked at her with a steady emphasis that paralyzed some unborn instinct in her. "You have always been fond of successes, try a failure. The charity of it alone will keep you pleased with yourself."

"I'm not sure that I ever want to get married." Zona had forgotten who was beside her; and for the moment merely meditated aloud.

"Why not?" He waited curiously—the tone was quite new for her.

"There is something"—her eyes rested suddenly on the white pillars of the Consulate, far down the hill—"so—so sinister about it—the way it works out, I mean. To think that two people can live together for years, and find out absolutely nothing about each other; and then some one else——" She broke off with a nervous little laugh. "Why, I'm getting positively serious, and I can't be serious with you, can I?"

"Can't you? The blue fire seemed to quench

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all her dislike, in that instant. "If you're worried and want help, can't you?"

She looked at him a minute longer; and then realized that she could be serious with him, as she could not have been with Winthrop or any one else—on this subject. "I am worried," she confessed hurriedly. "I am worried, dreadfully, and—there's not a soul that can help me out. Because—I am not at all sure that there is any real cause for worry! It's"—her voice gathered intensity—"it's just another phase of this Eastern uncertainty—this suggested, denied, half-exposed, then covered up existence of something that probably does not exist at all. Just another statement of the conundrum, as Mr. Winthrop calls it. Oh, how I detest it—how I shrink from it and fear it—and—and—yes!—am attracted by it!" The shame in her eyes, as she faced him, made her very young and appealing.

"Will you let me tell you why?" His voice was infinitely gentle. "You shrink from it because it is a thing of undercurrent, and your ways have always lain along the uncovered high-road; you fear the incomprehensible and detest what instinct hints to you that it may mean; and—you are attracted because in this whole mystery of Orientalism there dwells an element which is in each of us; and in each of us the strongest: the sex motive. You know nothing of it, therefore it worries you—frightens you, when you see it only half perceivingly in other people."

"I suppose that is it," admitted Zona with a phenomenal meekness.

"So," he continued cheerfully, "all you can do is to keep hands off—where you know nothing about the disease. But—don't let a suspicion of pathological possibilities keep you from undertaking the

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risk; marry—when the time comes that you can't help it!"

"Thank you!" All her irony returned with a rush. "Is this the voice of the experienced?"

"Of the merely material," he smiled; "a point of view which should be interesting to you by reason of its novelty."

"Do you know"—she turned her lashes insolently upon him—"I have no idea why I put up with you. No one else irritates me as you do."

"I know he doesn't," returned Maddox complacently; "he couldn't."

"Why not?" She realized her blunder the moment she had asked the question.

"Agrees with you," explained the mentor briefly; "thinks that after you're married you can go on living on the common joy of laws and logarithms; never jars upon your self-consciousness."

"All this is quite absurd," concluded Miss Raimund tardily. "I don't know whom you mean in the first place."

"Of course you don't—and that's a good sign; lying betokens awakening femininity."

"Which implies, I suppose, that you think I'm unfeminine. What should you say I am then—if I am not womanly—an object?"

"Not exactly—I should say a rather brusque boy, in his teens; I'm fond of boys myself; though women are my favourite complexity. When you get to be a woman, you will be charming." Something in his look suffocated the tart speech she had planned, and they went on down the hill in silence.

It was that mystic mellowed interval between sunset and gloaming, when the warm yellow of the tropics' day is vanishing to make herself more lovely

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for the night; rickshas, black and shiny against the runners' brown knotted legs, went scampering home from the club and the cricket ground; in place of the bamboo shades of mid-day, long cooling shadows hung about the large square houses, sweetened with the roses of the gardens; here a cobbler was gathering up his wheel-barrow, there a happy group of native children played at battle-dore and shuttle-cock; down the narrow foot-walk came a squad of "Tommies" in their bright red coats, crowding and chaffing each other; somewhere a band was playing, softly, and more graciously than bands usually play. It was the hour of relaxation, the hour of intimacy; the hour of all the day most alluring and full of possibilities. Maddox let it sift in through his quizzical, ever-present disappointment, and temper it. That everlasting picture of activity—platforms before packed houses, the rush and roar of shouting mobs of men, the buzz of many wires, the din of trains—all this was pushed into the corner of the lived-out day, and covered up by that caressing evening breeze of Eastern acquiescence. For the time being he felt at harmony with it—that East and its traditions; for the time being he saw it in all its peace, all its invitation; and he sympathized with Wayne's habit of not leaving it. Indeed he wondered indifferently why Wayne should bother with evasion, when accused of leaving it; the incongruity of the spider-drone with that relentless energy he—Maddox—knew so bitterly, brought the twist of a smile to his stubborn lips.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Zona—so abruptly that it startled him.

"I was thinking of Wayne in America," he answered without finesse. "It would be a joke, you

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know—for one of them. More probably for Wayne. I don't think—with all due patriotism—that our country's of an over-subtle wit."

"I hope to goodness that he doesn't go." The girl said it half under her breath. "Let—let him stay in his own atmosphere," she added defiantly, as they came in sight of the lotus of the Consulate garden. "I believe it is the only spirit that can compete with him. There! Am I not a thankless guest? I don't really mean any of it though, you see."

Because he knew just how much she did mean it, and because it was, in a way, her first confidence to him, Maddox grasped the moment aggressively, to fix it in her remembrance. "At any rate you have learned how to be serious with me, so that when you want to—the next time you want to—you'll be less ill at ease about it. I am here, you know—when you want me—even if I am a failure."

There was so much comfort in his voice, in the big convincing presence of him, that Zona thought involuntarily how impossible a failure he was; and then prodded herself for outgrowing a prejudice so weakly.

"You—you are very good," she answered hesitatingly, with that triteness which afflicted her shy moments only. "I—good-night."

The faint sweet wind of the sandalwood roses blew about them in the darkening stillness and lingered—just at the quaint bamboo gate. "Good-night," said Maddox slowly, holding it open for her. And he stood there watching her, until the small burnished head disappeared within the house; and with the last ray of twilight, the lotus flowers closed up.

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CHAPTER VII

"JUST darned laziness—that's the whole thing of it!" Armistead kicked his boots off disgustedly, and thrust out his square-toed feet for the slippers Wan Ho held. "You're too darn lazy even to explain what you think about it—too lazy to cable—too lazy to make up your mind! By the Lord Harry, Wayne, you make me sick! D'ye know it's three weeks now since you got the first wire?"

"Mrs. Twinehurst thought about four," murmured the consul, from his favourite chair by the railing; "though I fancy Mrs. Twinehurst doubles on time as recklessly as she does on bridge. Two has been a wild number for her, poor lady—there are Violet and Eunice——"

"Look here, I don't give a first class damn for Violet or Eunice or anybody else, and you know it, Randy Wayne! The point with me—and with every one else who knows anything about you—is: what're you going to do? If you're going to stay here, say so, and let's have it over; if you're going to break your life record and do something sensible——"

"There doesn't seem to be any real reason for it, does there?" Wayne's finely cut lips curved into their most winning expression. "I've grown used to myself the other way now, and——"

"Anyway you're not so dead as when we first

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came," interrupted Armistead triumphantly. "Once in a while you look as though you might really be living, ye know."

"I suppose I am—somewhere." The consul studied the corner of a fine handkerchief he had picked up near his chair. "Perhaps in the tenth heaven with Len's ancestors." For a moment he listened attentively—the scratch-scratch of a native quill came round the corner with the same regularity as Wan Ho's punkah flapped.

"Well"—John Armistead, the American, heard nothing—"you'd put us all in the seventh heaven like a shot if you'd only stop this everlasting shilly-shallying, and decide to come back to America where you belong. Why man"—he came over and laid an impressive hand on Randal's arm—"you don't realize what's being offered you! Here the Administration's making a whole new department which it probably intends to be *the* prize wind-up stunt of its four years, creating an entire new bureau, and one that's bound to be the most important for a while at least; and the head of the whole business they offer to you—hand it out on a gold platter for you to pick up—and you let it sit there spoiling, just because one o' these cat-footed yellow faces can't go along to carry it for you! I tell you you're the greatest lunatic outside a sanatorium. Why, in a year you could make that bureau and yourself the biggest side-show in the whole Republican circus. You could have the Presidential candidates makin' promises about it in their ante-nuptial speeches—you could boom it to 'Frisco and back—yes, even you, with your one-mule-power energy, and your ambition that ain't out of its swaddlin' clothes yet! Confound you—why don't you say you'll do it, eh?"

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"Sometimes I think I may," replied the consul, gazing down into the harbour. "And then sometimes—I shall decide one night at sunset," he reflected. "I have a fancy that I am more amiable at sunset."

"Amiable!" snorted Armistead; "you haven't enough spark in you not to be amiable. It's the most exasperating of all your luke-warm faults—this dashed amiability! Why a man can't even get mad with you and get any satisfaction out of it! Do you know you're keeping a whole nation waiting?" he demanded. "The Secretary told you he'd give you ten days to make up your mind—and that was more than they'd do for anybody but him, I'll warrant! And here it is three weeks, and you haven't answered yet. I cabled him Monday myself—after I'd tried to force your hand at that dinner."

"Do you think you reassured him?" Wayne smiled faintly at the baffled rage of two Napoleons turned aside by mere lack of effort. It proved the supremacy of his philosophy so easily.

"I told him what was doin' over here, anyway," Armistead's hard mouth set grimly. "I told him I was with him all right, and I am." As a matter of fact to *make* Randal, to get hold of him, under that shell of something maddeningly intangible, was becoming almost as much of a mania with Armistead as it was with Nicholas Wayne. "I said to Lil this morning that if I could have another month at you, I believed I could really stir you up to something." He glared at Wayne impatiently.

"And what did Mrs. Armistead say?" Wayne flicked a fly off Wrinkles' bony head.

"Lil? Oh she said something about your being Southern, and a different type from us."

"Us?"

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"Yes—she and I, you know." There was no reason for a sudden access of discomfort, yet Armistead chafed under that vague sense of ridicule which not infrequently came to plague him when he was "stirring Randal up." "Now see here——" He bolstered his pugnacity afresh. But the spasmodic-mannered secretary interrupted.

"If you please, sir, there are those papers to sign for the evening's boat. Would it be too much trouble for you to step in a moment now, sir?"

"No," thundered Armistead. "Certainly it wouldn't. He'll come right along."

The secretary paid not the least bit of attention. "It won't keep you long, sir," he said deprecatingly—being much better acquainted with the consul than was Armistead. "Just a few signatures, you know."

Wayne drew his long legs out of their comfort in the deck-chair. "I'll sign until this goes out," he promised, rolling a cigarette. "There'll be another boat in a week or two."

"Well, I'm damned!" Armistead acknowledged to Wrinkles—who looked after his master commiseratingly and without moving. "Another boat in a week or two—and those are probably official reports! I tell you, Lil," as his wife came slowly out on to the porch, "if I was that secretary I'd let out on Randy quicker'n a pin draws blood! I swear I would."

"Why?" A faint colour tinted Lilith's cheeks as she sat down in the broad swinging chair. So far, to question was her only form of non-acquiescence.

"Why? Why because here Randy—the consul—sits in the shade and smokes and receives people—can't even sign a few papers unless his blamed perversity lets him—while the secretary does the work and draws a quarter the salary! Consul! He knows

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about as much about China as if it was New South Wales. D'ye know he doesn't even know this province—he——"

"Why should he?" Lilith's smooth voice was as cool, and as hard, as the ivory ball that was so often in her hands.

"Well—er—a man is generally supposed to have a bowing acquaintance with the country in which he's representative," returned her husband dryly. "It would be an awkward thing for both Wayne and the United States if we should have war with China—though luckily enough he drew a British dependency. What he needs is to get back home where some one can see that he accomplishes something about once a year."

"What would he accomplish—back at home?" This third interruption of her husband's monologue was for Lilith a phenomenon that boded more to follow. "Why are you so anxious to have him go back to America?"

"'Cause he's a darned good fellow!" Armistead sat bolt upright with a sudden burst of affection. "Randy Wayne's got it in him to beat the whole shootin' match of men that bluster and—and tear around pulling up the ground." So unconsciously did the American foreswear his own gods—Push and Get Ahead—in acknowledgment of those he only dimly recognized. He's got a brain, that fellow, spite of his all the time shoving it under this mysterious sham talk of his. Have you ever noticed, Lil"—John Armistead pulled his chair into confidential range of his wife's—"how half the time when Randy talks—and talks a good deal too—he says absolutely nothing?"

"If he wanted to say something he could," said

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Lilith instantly, the ivory ball circling in her fingers less leisurely than usual.

"Of course he could," agreed Armistead irritably; "that's just what makes it so exasperating. You feel that he could say all sorts of things, and won't—just out of pure cussedness—because he's too lazy. Oh,"—he shook his thick-knit shoulders intolerantly—"it's part of the atmosphere, I reckon. Nothing out here has the ambition to move more than a punkah." He stopped fuming, and sank down into a pile of cushions.

"You used not to sit down during the day," observed his wife, half unconsciously.

"Eh—what?" Armistead jumped up, very red. "Can't a man rest for two seconds after he's been cooking himself for over a month up those confounded rivers?"

"Of course." Lilith opened her eyes wide. "Do you want another pillow?"

"No," growled Armistead, who had begun to lie down again and then thought better of it. "I'm not going to let the germ get *me*; just remember that. Where's Zona?"

"She went to a cricket match with Mr. Maddox." Lilith looked out over the glaring garden with a sigh of contentment; then her eyes strayed involuntarily through the long window into the house. But no one was coming out.

"Well, it seems Zona's still moving about, and Maddox—he would though, you know. Maddox'll be back in America just as soon as Fall comes round. He simply couldn't stand it to stay over here and let those fellows walk away with another election."

"He says he is going to Manila," put in Lilith.

"Oh well, he can say anything. But you mark my

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words, when September comes, it'll find Roger Maddox in Chicago, as hard at it as anybody. And I'd like to do something to help him win too—for he will win, this time. Nothing like a little failure to get a man's ginger up. By the way, Lil, 'twon't be so very long before we're going back ourselves. Gad!"—he drew a deep breath of satisfaction—"maybe I won't be glad to get out of this!"

Lilith looked about the veranda with eyes that had glazed suddenly. "Must we go away from here?" she asked dully; "soon?"

"Well, in about two weeks, I guess. One more trip, and I'm done—finished, thank the Lord. Yes, we'll be pulling out of here just about two weeks from to-day."

"I—I shall be sorry to go." Lilith's hand reached swiftly down to Wrinkles' hard little bullet-head. "This seems our home now. Mr. Wayne has been very kind."

"Sure he has." Armistead made the admission with a compunctious heartiness; it occurred to him that perhaps Randy thought he had said very little about his kindness. "What I'm working for, is to take Randy back with us."

"A—ahh!" It was hardly more than a sigh, yet the sound of it made Armistead uncomfortable. Sometimes he had heard the native women sob that way, under their breath.

"Don't you feel well, Lil?" He came over and pinched her ear kindly. "Perhaps"—he looked at her doubtfully—"you don't like Randy?"

"Oh, yes"—Lilith answered in her usual sweet toneless voice—"I like him"—she drew Armistead's hand round to her lips. "You are good—good. I will be your slave."

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"Nonsense!" The Westerner pulled his hand away quickly; he was always ill at ease when Lil talked what he called her Spanish lingo. It made him feel as though he did not have his coat on. "Nonsense—you're my wife, that's all, and I'm awfully fond of you—awfully fond," he repeated, smoothing her glowing mass of hair with awkward affectionate fingers. "Guess I'll try for forty winks," he decided uneasily; "I didn't get to bed till two last night."

And he relapsed again into his luxury of cushions.

It was the drowsiest hour of early afternoon, when to keep awake is a form of gymnastics. Inside the window Wan Ho's round black cap bobbed slowly back and forth with the swaying of his hand upon the punkah; Lilith was swinging dreamily in the broad arms of the double veranda-chair, her own long white arms wound round the chains; her figure and the punkah, and the drooping, stirring roses in the garden seemed to rock themselves into a poppy couch for Armistead; and soon he slept, his keen, strenuous face turned blindly to the strong light.

Occasionally Lilith looked at him, and every time looked back again at the long window. The serenity of her mouth had taken on something—who could say what?—this last month; her eyes were seldom gray. She had the expression of a creature who stands waiting, watching for a satisfaction which is never satisfactory. Oddly enough this attentiveness had routed out her look of the married woman, as it had routed the somnolent smoke from her eyes and left them clear jade-green. She had the indescribable appearance of a soul detached—perhaps because for such a long period her soul had been unextricated, left in mixed unity with stuffs and smells and har-

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monizing sounds. The eyes so closely concentrated on the window betrayed that.

After a little the square of emptiness she was watching filled; the master of the house stood there, regarding the sleeping man upon his pillows, and the alert olive eyes of the woman in the double swing. The flicker of a smile curled his lips: it was he who had reversed the two consciousnesses.

"What are you doing?" He came softly and sat beside Lilith with the ease of settled habit. "Keeping Jack asleep?"

"He went to sleep because he could not help it," she returned seriously. "When he works so hard how can he keep his eyes open?"

"True," said the consul thoughtfully; "how can he? But I suppose he makes a great deal of money. He has succeeded out here."

"Yes." Lilith relaxed suddenly in her corner. "He has only one more trip to make. He says—he says we shall leave here in two weeks."

"Two weeks!" His narrow gaze touched her more lightly than the flutter of the punkah; yet she shivered. "And you have been here six—are you glad to go?"

Her lips reddened with a strange intensity. "He wants you to go with us," she said in a low vibrant voice.

"And if I don't—you will come back?" He watched her closely, for she was more of a habit with him than he knew.

"I will come back if Jack will let me." All the ardour had gone out of her voice.

If Jack would let her! The elemental appreciation of it stimulated his interest to persistence. Jack was the guardian, the authority, the controller; while

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he— "Just what do you think of me?" he asked, curious to hear what she would say.

"I gave up going to confession because of you," she said unemotionally, as one states a fact.

"I see." He rejoiced that her simplicity was the one complex thing about her; it had unexpected turns into the subtle, which was his creed. "You gave up going to confession—why?" The redoubling of the question was unusual for him. But she was an unusual woman—and he knew women very well.

She looked at him a little dazed, like one feeling back into a shadowy past. "My mother said the priests could not always understand; that sometimes"—she glanced about fearfully—"we—we were wiser than the priests. She said we had to choose—between the wrath of God and all our happiness. I do not care about the wrath of God. I—Randy!" The eloquence that thrilled from between her long lids was more effectual in its suggestion than all John Armistead's talk or the cables of the Secretary of State.

"I believe——" Wayne half rose, on the first impulse that had conquered his inertia for many years. "Come inside," he said softly, "I want to send——"

But tactlessly, as he did everything, John Armistead woke up just then; and killed his wife's intention with a yawn. "Ain't time for tea, I suppose?" he began, stretching to a wider sprawl of comfort. "Oh, hello, Randy! Cigarette gone out?"

"Yes," said Wayne curiously, "yes—just before I signed the last document. It's quite as well, I suppose; the thing can wait."

"Well, I'll go and tidy up a bit." Armistead was still too sleepy to argue. "Guess I must have dozed

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off," he concluded, as Wan Ho's red-buttoned cap appeared over the tea-tray. "Anyway, I won't be long."

He drew himself regretfully out of the cushioned hammock and stood for a moment flushed and towsled, with his tie under one ear and a collar that was no longer perceptible. Wayne looked past him at Wan Ho—immaculate, unobtrusive, noiseless, his blue gown and shiny black cap, making pleasant composition with the lacquered teapoys. And it came to the consul that between these two daily pictures lay his choice—they represented the activities and attitude of two continents. "Missee L'Ahmstead makee tea?" asked Wan Ho softly.

Wayne started. Here again rose a choice; he had grown used to having Lilith make his tea—her long bare arms among the brasses.

"Can do," he answered briefly. "Mrs Armistead come downside chop-chop." For Lilith had vanished with Jack's suggestion that it was time to "tidy up." Two weeks and she would no longer come. He wondered half wistfully if it was an emotion that came to him with the thought—for out of every other matter rose invariably his own self-consciousness, wearily indomitable, though its monotonies were worn threadbare. He turned from them gratefully as a quiet step came round from the front entrance. "Must be Len, come back from the joss," he murmured; "the old weasel!"

But some one else laid two cool hands over his eyes. "What's being shredded now?" laughed Caro, releasing him. "Was it the prayers of our ancestors or Wrinkles' psychology that was up for analysis?" Her opaque eyes mocked him with the friendliest understanding.

"It might have been you," he regarded her with

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smiling seriousness, "if I hadn't thought you were Len."

"*Did* you think I was Len?" her blue-black brows curled down about her eyes—then she became all English. "Do you know, I'm awfully glad I found you alone, Randal, because"—she took the straightest chair—"I want to have a talk with you. Um-m," as his glance interrogated, "a regular Mrs. Twinehurst talk. You need it, you know, and—and I modestly believe that I'm the only person who can give it to you."

"That was just what she said," observed the consul absently, "'you'll take it better from me, won't you, Mr. Wayne?'"

"Well, you've got to take it from me, that's all the difference." Caro sat forward with a compelling emphasis. "You owe me an hour or so of boredom in exchange for those I spent getting you out of your acclimation indiscretions nine years ago."

"I was much more interesting then," he suggested—without defence.

"You were about the same amount of trouble," she informed him calmly. "Less then, perhaps—because then one could use one's pound of cure. Now one can only struggle to get you over the preventing habit. Look here, Randy"—her eyes narrowed like his—"you aren't a coward?"

"What do you think?" For once he paid her the stupendous compliment of taking her seriously.

"I hardly know what to think. And yet I know you better—far better—than most people. I've seen you in your—er, less engaging moments, and you"—her agreeable voice grew a trifle grim—"have seen me in mine. But all the same, I can't make up my mind if you're a coward, or only on the way to being

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something unusually great. As a matter of fact"—her words lagged speculatively—"I don't think you have made up your mind yet. So far you are merely dabbling—with both possibilities. Now listen—don't interrupt—it only squanders sequence. Unfortunately we were neither of us, you or I, born Orientals; so that to a certain extent this lying domino of skin and bone hampers us. But, my dear Randal"—she leaned forward with an almost yearning light in her great eyes—"don't you know we have to do something to get away from it—to get away from that inside Eastern soul that nags and nags us till the incessant call of it nearly takes our reason? What"—the question came a whisper—"what would I have been by this time if I had not married a foolish little clergyman—a child, whose limitations take all my dangerous introspective time? What will you be—have you thought?—in another nine years, if you do not sink the side that you are sick of finding out—bury it, stamp it out past recognition; in a bureau, or in politics, or in shoveling coal! What difference does it make? It is the end that you must come to realize; that you must have regard for. Have you considered?"—her tone gathered all the significance of a religion shared—"you are dealing with a question of soul!"

"No," he said very quietly. "I had not considered it. Thank you."

"Oh, I tell you"—her voice shook suddenly—"I know its power, this East—the clutch of its hypnotism; how it gets its very claws into one's imagination and grips it captive for the rest of time. But Randal, you can get away still; this is the place where you can break the chain—the only place. If you stay now, it will be—forever!"

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"Yes," he assented slowly, "I suppose it will be—forever."

"And you mustn't do that, you mustn't do that. Think"—very practically, but with an Oriental's subtlety of attack she chose the chief source of his tedium—"there is no new interest here; there never will be. In America everything is changing, re-creating; you can try your power, you can pull the wires and cheat destiny to the extent of hanging that of other men about their necks; you can simply sit in an office and twirl a world about your finger—for you have a science with which no world can cope; you can run away and come back and run away again—there will be something new—new every minute, every heart-beat. You may even"—she laid a slim hand on his arm—"discover a new self! Can you resist it?"

He took her quivering face between his hands. "You are the most merciless analyst in the world," he said not quite steadily, "and the rarest friend. I'm going to kiss you"—he drew her up to him very gently—"differently——"

"He *is* going then, *isn't* he, Violet?"

"Oh yes, he told auntie, *didn't* he, Eunice? At least auntie said he was almost sure to go."

Caro drew herself out of his arms, and away, as up the garden path bobbed two frilly sunshades followed by a pair of slightly bent shoulders. "If you don't," she said lightly—yet somehow one felt tragically—"I shall divorce Rollo, that's all."

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CHAPTER VIII

WINTHROP turned away from the club, and walked slowly through the drizzling heat towards the Consulate. It was a route his feet had come to take by instinct, although he imagined that voluntary judgment had a great deal to do with it. To-night he had seen Wayne and Armistead well started at a game of pool, before a stroll down the hill had suggested itself to him. For one thing he had been there already that day, but aimlessly, since it was with Violet and Eunice—and Zona had not been at home. Propinquity, the imp, had during the last six weeks rendered a good many things aimless to Winthrop if Zona was not of them. The even-minded philosopher half confessed it to himself to-night as he was on his way to her; it had occurred to him that day that in a week or two she would be gone altogether out of those many satisfactory hours they had spent in each other's congeniality, that he would no longer be engaged in the agreeable task of training a discrimination already pleasantly akin to his—and the realization discomfited him. Why not annex the satisfaction permanently, he asked himself? Why let it slip out of his hands, now that its fulfilment—Zona's fulfilment—was so well under way?

Yet so finely stretched was his critical perception that he held back, and walked slowly. Six weeks in

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conventional atmosphere is absurdly short to determine a woman; six weeks in unhampered intimacy perhaps too long. His decision hesitated—with one eye on Maddox the while. That person of determination could not be counted upon to behave "rationally," as Winthrop put it. He quickened his step. After all he wanted Zona; he wished to marry a mind rather than a mate, and the mind of her he knew quite well. Had not he himself moulded it? and as a disciple of his ideals—his whole *credo*—had he not found her gratifyingly pliable. Besides, he told himself convincingly, it would be an excellent leaven for what some of his friends termed his over-asceticism—this marriage with a girl who, while quite congenial with his concepts of things, was yet by heritage and fortune distinctly of the world worldly.

As he went in from the murky, thickish evening, and found her sitting by a lamp, whose amber caught the tender splash of bronze above her ear, and glorified the boyishness of her young figure, he looked at Zona eagerly.

"You were not here this afternoon," he said, sitting down with a sort of explanatory deprecation.

"No—no, I went to a cricket match." It sounded silly when one told it to Winthrop—a cricket match! Yet she had enjoyed it very much. "I suppose you don't go to them?" she asked wistfully.

"Well, I never have. To-day I had an article to do—before er—the Miss Lorrilards came for me."

"Did they come for you?" Zona's intuition nudged her nervously to draw out chit-chat as long as possible. A little elementary flirtation lore would have helped marvellously—but she had none. 'They—they're very cordial girls, aren't they?" She had risen from

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her chair and was doing quite unnecessary but absorbing things to Wayne's quaint lantern lamps.

"Oh, very cordial," Winthrop assented hastily. As a matter of fact he was quite as ill at ease as she was.

Sometimes it is a predicament, never before to have asked a girl to marry you. Dialogue rather slinks under the table and titters at you for having expected any assistance from it at such a time; and the most pertinent sentences once out are apt to sound pure rot.

"Perhaps you would like to see Lilith." Still only Zona's profile was turned to him, as she bent absorbedly over the last of the long lamps.

"Oh no—that is, later on will do as well, thank you. The fact is" (one could almost see his purpose trace itself) "er—do you think much of marriage, really?" He waited in some suspense for her to answer.

"Do I think much of it?" Zona sat down again, looking rather vague.

"Yes—do you think it's a very lofty thing, and idealize it, and so on? Most young women do, you know."

This alone would have made any young woman swear that she did not. "I haven't any illusions about it, if that's what you mean," replied Zona with a very wise smile—that was also very funny, had any married person been there to see. "I—I never thought much about it. All the married people I know are so uninteresting."

"That's just it! They're uninteresting—because they have lost interest in themselves. In the first place they start out with a perfectly selfish passion for each other, and when that languishes they're left simply helpless. Now with us"—very normally Zona

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jumped—"we know the whole estate for just what it is worth; we're congenial as to the things we have read and talked about; and I don't see why we shouldn't make a very good thing out of it. You see," he went on confidently, "we should neither of us be the least bit dependent on the other; we would come and go quite as we do now, and——"

"It doesn't seem to me we'd get anything that we haven't got now," said Zona, "and in that case I'd rather stay as I am. It doesn't seem worth while changing, does it?"

He looked at her with sudden suspicion; but she was quite serious. "Certainly it is worth while," he returned, warmed to argument by this unexpected resistance. "Isn't it worth while to be with some one who thinks as you do?"

"Yes it is," Zona remembered gratefully, as she thought of the sustained satisfactoriness of him during the past uneasy month or two. "But then—marriage is so permanent," she went on meditatively. "I should have to think about it for a long time before I undertook it."

"But you're going away in a week or two." Winthrop's dismay was comically in contrast to his vaunted non-dependence. "Look here, you've known me long enough; I should think you could make up your mind at once. I—why I thought you liked me rather well." Now that he considered it the conceit of him began to humble itself; perhaps after all Maddox——

"I do like you—very well. I'm just a little topsy-turvy these days," she explained half tremulously. "All the things I've believed are being upset and mauled about, and I don't dare do anything important without giving myself every chance of not doing it. Perhaps when I get back to America I'll be more

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normal; at any rate I will think it out as clearly as I can before I leave—you will wait a little?"

"I will try to," he looked anything but cheerful about it. "It *is* a disconcerting atmosphere, isn't it?"

"Yes"—Zona shut her lips tightly—"it is." She was thinking of what Caro had said, about those unseen spirits that are always present, framing the actions, influencing the decisions, directing the whole consciousness of those they live among—and the truth of the suggestion weighed her down with its significance. She went over and opened the window on to the veranda. "I can't help the fog," she told Winthrop; "it is too oppressive to exist in here." And she flung up the sash and stood a moment listening. A faint scratch-scratch came through the yellow mist. With it Zona closed the window with a bang. "After all the air in here is better," she decided through pale lips, turning up the lamps to get an effect at least of cheeriness. It was the same close air of the other night, before the earthquake, when she had lain in bed trying to go to Lilith, but held back, detained by some invisible force she dimly felt to be supreme for her—a shrinking, impersonal New England force, that made her think almost hysterically of her father, and his cold uncompromising judgments. The next day she had laughed at herself; she had not even put this much of the experience into words. But she began to watch—and to be more sensitive to the unspoken; and as a result she had admitted to Maddox that she was worried. There was nothing, however, that she could lay her hand upon—only a sentiment; and since Armistead had come home again, she felt the responsibility was shifted, and looked at everything more lightly. Her imagina-

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tion, she told herself the minute she had shut the window, needed severe pruning.

During the hour that Winthrop stayed she tried to attend to his talk about his work, and what they could make of it together; tried to concentrate on the idea of herself married, and of use to some one. For after all, she decided suddenly, that was what she would get out of it: the privilege of belonging, of being relevant, to another creature. Hitherto she had been somewhat, as Maddox said, an isolated intellect; and being with Lilith had made her wistful for that family sense from which she had always been debarred. Lilith herself could not contribute to it—for with Zona kinship had as yet to be founded on understanding, and certainly no two beings in the world were farther from understanding than these cousins who alone remained to each other—but she had made the girl long for it, and aware for the first time that in circumstances of uncertainty no mental keenness would take its place, as comfort. If she could make up her mind to take Winthrop, Zona reflected (meanwhile holding intelligent conversation with him on carved bronzes), she would gain all this that she missed, as well as prolong the congeniality which he suggested; and she began to be sorry that she had put off accepting him. The time would never come when she "could not help" marrying—or anything else, for that matter; and since the sane thing, and the thing which appealed to her judgment, if not to her capricious impulse, was—

She had just come to this point, when some one called her—from upstairs.

"Zona! Zona! will you come to me a minute?" It was Lilith's vague sweet voice.

"Yes, I am coming." Full of wonder, she excused

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herself to Winthrop; Lilith had her maid—never before had she wanted anything.

"Are you ill?" she asked as she entered Lilith's room, seeing that her cousin was very pale.

"No—no. Sit here." Lilith drew a chair close to the bed, but as Zona took it, herself remained standing; pushing the gleaming bands of her hair back from her forehead, as though they hurt her. In her long white wrapper she looked unusually tall, and her heavy lids unmasked to show eyes that sent out little points of fire. "I came up to say my prayers," she began, glancing at the cross that hung beside her bed, "but my saint will not hear me. The priest has told her I have not been to confess. I must confess, I must confess," she moaned, gathering her rosary up to her breast; "I am afraid to be by myself, and my mother said only the wicked are like that. What shall I do—what shall I do, Zona?" She caught the girl almost roughly by the arm. "Oh, if only you were a Catholic!" she whispered sobbingly.

Zona stared. This was a Lilith she had never seen before. "What do you want to do?" she asked, remembering that that was invariably what Lilith did.

"I want to pray, to ask for something—and I cannot. They will not listen; they tell me it is sinful, this thing I want. Mother of God!" She flung herself abasingly, yet passionately rebellious at the foot of the black cross. "Then why do you let me want it? Why do you curse me, when I have given candles and alms to the poor, and—aih!" Her head went down upon her knees, its masses of red-gold pouring gorgeously about her.

Zona looked down at her uncomfortably. Another woman would have taken Lilith in her arms and cried over her; but Zona was not even a woman yet.

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"There, get up," she suggested, awkwardly as John Armistead; "if the thing is wrong——"

"Wrong—what is wrong? Is it wrong to breathe, to eat, to lie down at night and sleep? God of my soul! How can I say if it is wrong!"

"I mean, if it is not in accordance with universal law, if it will injure others, work against the greatest good. One has to consider the whole social integer, don't you see, not just——"

"I do not understand you." Lilith's voice came dully from beneath her hair. "Go back again. It does not matter. You are too clever."

No malice of forethought could have damned cleverness more subtly. But Lilith had never known satire in her life; and Zona was too young in sympathy to recognize the insinuation of the speech. "I expect I had better go down again;" she rose uneasily. "Mr. Winthrop is here. He came to ask me to marry him," she added—so naturally that it was a phenomenon, for Zona.

The woman on her knees straightened up slowly, turned until she could reach out and lay her long white hands on the girl's shoulders where she sat beside the bed. "Do you love him?" she asked simply.

Under the compelling pressure Zona winced. She had not thought anything about loving him. Lilith's question made it quite a matter.

"We—we are very congenial," she stammered, for the first time in her life incapable before her cousin. "I—I have not altogether made up my mind yet." Any one else would have told her that when it became necessary to marry the thing into the mind it was hopeless, bereft of all emotion.

"If you do not love him"—those strong slender hands pressed more emphatically upon her shoulders

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—" where is the use? You have plenty of money."

Zona opened her mouth to scorn the implication, and then remembered suddenly the antithesis of Lilith's present attitude from that in which she had lain complacent on her couch a month ago. Then she had had nothing to say about love. The girl's quick mind shrank from her reinforced suspicion.

" Listen to me, Zona," the married woman was speaking in a new, peculiarly ardent voice, her hands had fallen and clasped themselves upon her knees. " When the women of our family love, it is to the death —you understand? You think you are Northern, but I tell you you will love madly—as our mothers did, as we—all the Tangueys—do. And when this man comes, the man you love " (something in Zona's throat choked involuntarily), " if you are married " —her eyes dilated to great burning circles of black— " you—you will kill yourself, or else sin." The throb went out of her voice, leaving it strangely dead. " We all do. And you are one of us."

Zona shivered. Lilith had risen, and stood there above her like some oracular goddess, pronouncing sentence; also—quite unconsciously—laying bare her own sentence in all the tragedy of its suggestion. Yet —so inexperienced was the girl—the full meaning of the suggestion failed to reach her; she only felt a gain that intense discomfort, that shrinking through antagonistic uneasiness that plagued her always in the East—always, though more especially to-night.

She was uncomfortable, and she was unable to lessen her discomfort, since she could not analyse it. She felt—vaguely—sorry for Lilith; but she had no idea how to express that feeling. To-night, in spite of her distraction, Lilith seemed above her, moved by some bigger thing than she (Zona) had ever come into

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contact with; in her quick but always intense change of passion, the older woman seemed all Spanish—was, as a matter of fact, all elemental. Now, apparently quite forgetful of Zona, she had fallen on her knees again and had caught up her rosary; no longer the goddess prophetic, but very much the woman suppliant. The room, lit only by the two long candles on either side of the crucifix, grew all at once overpoweringly oppressive to the girl who could not understand its strangely concentrative spirit.

"If—if I could help you, Lilith—" She rose from her chair deprecatingly, half timidly. "But there seems to be nothing I can do, and——"

The woman on her knees before the cross did not turn round. "You don't know anything about it," she muttered between her beads, "you are only a child. Go back again; you know nothing about it."

Relieved, Zona went. But in the hall, from the head of the stairs, she looked back. The door into Lilith's room was half open, and she could see, as in the slide of some gorgeous shadow-show, the crouching flame-veiled figure, now with the black crucifix pressed passionately against its lips, the narrow candle light painting its pale features vivid.

Impatiently she shook herself. "She is merely a sensualist, with a sensualist's imagination." But then came back that significant, disturbing answer: "You are only a child; you know nothing about it!" And as she went on downstairs, she admitted with unusual humility that perhaps she did not know; certainly, as Caro had predicted, her cleverness in this atmosphere seemed to go for nothing.

As she joined Winthrop again, Wayne came into the hall—and for a moment she could hardly speak

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to him. Then "Where did you leave Cousin John?" she asked shortly.

"At the club. A man from Washington came in —Phelps, do you know him? and Jack——"

"Was it Herbert Phelps?" asked Zona eagerly. "I used to go to school with Mary—his wife."

"Yes, that is the name." Wayne wondered—as much as he ever wondered at anything—at Miss Raimund's enthusiasm. He had seen the wife, and she was the most harmless contrast to Zona that any creator could have thought of. "Jack wanted to ask Phelps about some Bill, I believe, so I didn't wait. They are stopping at the *Grand*."

With his usual consideration Wayne went on into the dining-room.

"Mary Phelps!" At any other time Zona herself would have wondered why under the sun she was glad of the chance to see Mary. Now she only thought of her as some one from home, and easily understood. "You must meet her," she told Winthrop. "We were at Miss——" suddenly she stopped, her glance arrested by the lamps.

They were swaying slightly. "It is an earthquake!" she cried, springing up. "I must go to Lilith." But just then the lights went out, and the house rocked her off her balance into the nearest chair. Doors banged, furniture creaked, some vases on the table crashed and fell, all in a second; then came a terrified beseeching scream; and Zona felt the answering haste of a tall body rush past her up the stairs. She tried to go herself, but fell against the balustrade and had to wait again. Then came the trained equipoise of native feet, and so candles, and reassurance, as the sickening motion grew less violent. She reached the landing before Wan Ho got there

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with the light; and then—stumbling, fighting impotently against that nasty chuckle of the earth—gained Lilith's room. The door was shut. Zona flung it open, breathing in sharp exhausted gasps, "Lilith, Lilith, I am here. Don't be afraid—it is I, Zona; where are you, Lilith?" And she groped for her in the darkness.

But there was no answer. An almost death-like stillness seemed to have seized the room, as though no human presence could have been there. Zona snatched the light from Wan Ho's hand, and held it high about her head—straining her eyes as she peered everywhere for that white figure. But the place was absolutely empty. In the middle of the floor a rosary lay shattered to bits; the black crucifix had rolled into a corner, face downward, at the feet of the grinning God of To-morrow.

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CHAPTER IX

"DON'T be afraid—you are here with me; you are quite safe." The musical trainante voice smoothed itself over Lilith's returning consciousness even more quietly than usual. "You fainted, you know. Are you better now?"

The long ivory lids unmasked—upon that unique green flame which had flashed to him from the first. "I am here—with you: I am very well indeed." And she drew his hands up to her lips and kissed them—not feverishly, nor passionately grateful, as he had seen her kiss Armistead's, but with a lingering reverence that brought Wayne's interest less blinkingly upon her.

It pleased him intensely that she lay silent—consistently without that feminine mania for detail which would have led every other woman on earth to have asked where she was, and how she came there, and why. Neither antecedent nor consequence held any significance for Lilith. It was enough that she was with her desire—and so, absolutely satisfied. Wayne had never known a woman content, as she was, to live not merely in the present, but in the second; contemplating her, he ever sighed his own contentment. To a person with whom the Book of Life is a stale story, the primer appeals as the most wonderfully complicated satisfaction; and when the simple volume is *de luxe*—

"You are the most enjoyable woman I have ever

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seen," he concluded deliberately, looking down at her with a—momentarily—impersonal gaze. "Women were created for one of two things: to be mothers, or the means of gratification; and yours is the more alluring alternative. The marvellous part of it is that you keep to your calling, without attempting introspection, self-analysis, or any of the pointless ineffectual reasoning by which the rest of the sex spoil themselves. If only they realized the futility of it—the sickening circle round which argument has run, and must run, throughout the drab forever;—but they don't. They insist on losing their *raison d'être*—beauty—over the pros and cons of the everlasting Why?—all of them—except you," he meditated, smiling at her with a singular sweetness.

Lilith met the smile with one of almost childish adoration. She had not the least idea what he was talking about; but she gathered that he was pleased with her, and that was sufficient.

"You drew me first," he went on talking to himself aloud, "because you were so entirely uninquisitive about yourself, so unalive. I have liked waking you up—you have stayed so satisfyingly consistent in your loveliness, and your undisturbed brainlessness. You are still so content to be 'just an ordinary woman'—and that makes you a most extraordinary woman indeed. I should feel the lack of you, if you went away."

Here was something Lilith understood. She sat up with a swift intensity. "When I go away, you—you will go too?" The inflection rose with throttling entreaty. "To-night—before the earthquake"—she went on breathlessly, yet slowly, as one whose eloquence fights with physical expression—"I tried to say my prayers—to ask that you might go with us—but my saint would not hear me—I had not been to

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confess—and when the earthquake came, and I called—I was very frightened—I called to the Virgin—and You" (her voice vibrated to an ardour that made even him wince). "You came! It was just before—when I heard your step—that I stamped on my rosary, and broke it. I threw my cross"—she looked about her with instinctive terror—"I threw my cross away—Randy!"

He knew that she could have made no more vehement appeal, had she possessed an intellect, and all the powers of operating it; and as it was she had never talked so consecutively at length in all her life—that he knew also. With her, too, his going had come to mean a question of soul.

"You threw away your cross," he repeated curiously. "What does that mean?"

"It means that I shall be damned and go to hell." Lilith shivered; but the next minute drew closer to him. "It does not matter," she whispered with a long sigh of abnegation. "I am happy—happy, if——" Characteristically she would not voice her wish again, but the deep emerald fire pled with a desperate tenacity.

And he had started all this! It occurred to Wayne that anything once started can never be arrested; that everything one starts oneself was started before by somebody else, and will be started again and restarted as long as there are atoms left to magnetize energy; that one can never find out the original source nor the eventual end of all beginning, nor can one refuse to play the intermediary unless—one forces the keyless door and finds out Everything. There is that one way to stop starting. But the way looked less attractive to him than ever before in his negligent, aloof existence; that fragile web of his fastidious interest had caught

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up something at last which wound itself within the mesh more tightly than he had anticipated. And the woman of his recreation, though completed, still appealed to his imagination. It was this that came to startle him, in his consideration how to answer her.

At last; "I almost believe I want to go," he murmured half inaudibly.

But she heard him, and the faint, faint hint of promise brought the ecstatic blood to her face so that her cheeks were rose and her lips vivid.

"Yes—yes! You want to go—you shall go—*Dios!*" She stood up with a foreign access of energy, and faced him; not as it had seemed to Zona like an oracle of destiny, but rather as an imperative Carmen, the very glint of whose hair and glow of whose eyes leapt at him. "Et si tu ne m'aimes, prends garde à toi!" The words sprang from her attitude if not her lips, and made him look again at her, as though at a creature he had never seen before. Her ancestors, so seen, were after all the most interesting part of her: there were sudden unexpected turns in their dignity which only made it greater by the contrast.

He went and laid his hands upon her shoulders, losing them in the thick red-gold waves that pleased him more than most things; and his eyes shut to mere slits of scrutiny, as they bent to the level of hers.

"Perhaps you are right," he said slowly; "perhaps I shall go with you—and Jack. I was always fond of Jack," he meditated.

"He is very generous." The woman agreed in the light of her appreciation. Her face was transformed—hardly flesh in the radiance of its delight.

"Um-m! Exactly. Well—I will tell you in the morning. I must take you back now."

"Back?" For the first time her eyes took in the

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place where they were—and before, she had used to note each detail of surrounding, almost reflexively. "Where is this?"

It was a low, rather small room, whose cement walls had been covered with a yellow calsomine, and whose two chairs—one of them the invariable bamboo folding chair which was everywhere in the consul's house—constituted all its decoration. Different sorts of lamps were about, and a pile of albums in one corner; nothing more.

"I used to use it for a developing-room," explained Randal, smiling involuntarily at the remembrance of so much enthusiasm. "When I first came out, I was quite tiresome about it—photographs I mean. It is just underneath the garden—at this temperature one couldn't stand a closed room above ground."

Lilith was walking gravely about, examining the bareness of it with solemn curiosity.

"The door is at the end, behind that screen," Wayne told her, amused; and at the same time occupied with the primitive absorption she gave alternately to the infinite and the trivial. "I carried you down here because it was the only place where the rocking would seem less—and where no woman could find you to have hysterics with her," he added. "Shall we go back—it is only up a short stairway to your dressing-room."

"My dressing-room!" Lilith's eyes stopped in their attention to him, and a gray, gray film swept their olive. "Jack will be there," she said simply.

"No, he will not—I left him at the club, hardly half an hour ago. He is too busy making money to come home. Shall we go?"

"Yes." She clung to the instant frantically, for once almost breaking the record of her acquiescence. "Yes—to-morrow—in the morning?"

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"To-morrow, in the morning," he repeated; then "Wait!" And he turned on all the lights in the little room, until of its walls there remained only a yellow curtain, and that too seemed transparent and of no material existence. As the woman with her wreathing veil of flame came slowly towards him, the spirit of the man called Randal Wayne cried itself past his passivity, and went to meet her with a yearning that for him was the epitome of self-denial: for the moment he was desire holding opportunity fast clasped, and that chaotic ribbon spelt life-time ran through his wraith of memory as so much worthlessness. John Armistead's terse argument; the colony's inane disputings; even the probing insight of that woman for whom as for him the ribbon curled at the ends—all became shadowy—irrelevant, glanced off and fell unheeded—beside this consciousness of unselfconsciousness, in which the spirit lost itself for the first time. There had laid hold of him something *which he had never felt before;* something as different from the mere gratified sense which ordinarily rules contact as clay is from crocus. It seemed as though that innate sweetness, that fine sympathy of heart which he had buried centuries ago, was alive to its resurrection.

"I almost believe I love you," he said strangely, pushing her from him, and looking at her till the intensity of his eyes blinded hers. "If I do—that would be the greatest joke of all the great Jester's fancies, would it not? There—go; to-morrow I will tell you." But he took her again, and looked at her for a long time, before he finally led her out to the narrow stairs. Even after she had turned their spiral, till he could see only the sheen of her hair, he stood gazing after her.

But at last he went back once more into the blazing room where he had lost himself for the first time—if

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only for a minute. The novelty of the sensation beckoned to him. "You may even find a new self—can you resist it?"

"I hardly think I can," he said to the still room, with a lingering sigh. "A new self—at the hands of a woman who does not understand ten words I say!"

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CHAPTER X

"WHERE were you when the earthquake came, Lil?" John Armistead went on eating toast, as he asked the question. "You were sleepin' sound's a mummy by the time I got home."

"I was in my room, saying my prayers," answered Lilith slowly.

"George!—so that was it! I had the perfect deuce of a time, skating around on those darn broken beads in my bare feet—couldn't imagine what in Halifax I was steppin' on. How'd you come to break 'em?" Without waiting for her answer he went on. "Suppose you'd like me to get you another string, while I'm away this time, hm?"

"No," said Lilith, raising her eyes steadily to his. "I don't want another. Did you say you were going directly after breakfast, Jack?"

"Well, pretty soon," returned Jack—who had begun to stare at her for the strange inconsistency, but became quickly absorbed in his own plans. "You see, Phelps took it into his head that he'd like to come along—fellow of not much grit, y'know, but lots of money to invest—and his going puts us off a little. He'll have to fix it up with his wife so as to get off for a week—from what he said I reckon she's a trifle fussy—and—oh, 'morning, Randy! How you feelin' since the tumult? A bit pasty, eh?"

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"Oh, I'm quite as usual." Wayne sat down opposite Lilith, looking, as a matter of fact, white and drawn about the eyes. "Will you give me some coffee?" was the first thing he said to her, smiling faintly at the quaintness of it.

When she handed it to him, her eyes made his face a shrine.

"So you're off this morning, Jack?" He turned quickly to Armistead, grateful that Zona had not yet come down. "And this is your last trip?"

"Yes"—Armistead helped himself to a large slab of marmalade—"Yes, the next time I go, it'll be for good." He regarded Wayne with a sudden sharp concentration. "I'm going down to see about my reservations this morning," he added. "Will you come along, old chap?"

The man of compulsion had never appeared to kinder advantage; perhaps something in the consul's fine weary face took hold of his impatience to soften it; or perhaps the perfect hospitality of those six weeks shamed his irritation at his friend. At any rate, John Armistead had never been more sincerely honest in his loyalty, than when he asked Wayne simply, and trustfully, if he would "come along."

"I'll think about it," replied Wayne gently, after an instant like the stretching of a thin, thin silken string; his tone so promising that Armistead rejoiced —with the (for him) rare tact of silence; thinking of how he would cable Nicholas Wayne the encouragement, before he should leave town.

"That's fine," was all he said, casting about for some conversational topic. "Phelps says they're going on around the world, but me for the States again! By the way, Lil, Mrs. Phelps knows Zona." Glancing at his wife, Armistead stopped, stupefied; she was so

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radiantly beautiful that even he had to notice it. And ten minutes before he had thought carelessly that Lil was "lookin' a bit off her complexion." "Er, yes," he went on confusedly, "knew her at some Washington school or other. Say, where is Zona? Sick?" The girl was usually the first one down and accomplishing breakfast.

"Agnes said she had a headache"—nothing in the world could have thrilled like the sweetness in Lilith's voice, in which all happiness seemed to have been magnetized—"but that she would be down presently."

"Earthquake must have done her up," commented her cousin-in-law with some apprehension. Zona was one of the few people he found difficult of determining. "Now I think of it, Winthrop said she seemed quite shaky—said something about her being frightened about you. Now why should she have been frightened about you?" The husband's puzzled eyes saw in that narrow gaze from across the table no reason.

"She may have thought I was afraid," said Lilith vaguely. "I—I was not afraid."

"Of course you weren't!" Armistead was in the habit of thanking God that she was not, when he saw other men's wives having hysterics and lady-like fainting fits. "What's there to be afraid of? I reckon Zona was a lot worse scared than you were, from what Winthrop said. He came into the club, just before I left. I declare the fellow seemed quite upset. Sweet on Zona, isn't he?"

"He seems to like her very much."

Wayne often thought that if Mr. and Mrs. Armistead had the world to themselves, life would be one straight line, unbroken by other deviation than question and answer.

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"Thought so." Armistead rolled his napkin into a compact cylinder. "D'ye think she'll take him, Lil?"

"She does not love him." Lilith stopped there, as though there was nothing more to be said.

"Funny—now I should have said he was just the sort of fellow would suit Zona—brains, and all that new higher thought; the things she's keen about——"

"I tell you she does not love him." Lilith spread her wonderful hands conclusively—as near impatiently as she ever arrived.

"Perhaps," said Wayne tentatively, "Miss Raimund is pretending to herself that she likes him. She may want to marry him to escape some one else."

"Well, of all everlastingly jiggered reasoning!" Armistead's jaw dropped, and he turned to his wife for reinforcement. "Were you ever one of that kind, Lil?"

"I never went to college," replied Lilith, with an irony she could not have produced voluntarily, had she coached for a thousand semesters. "I was just a girl, you know."

"Yes, thank the Lord you were! We might have been shilly-shallying still if you'd practised any of this black-art pretending Randy talks about. But you didn't. You were the most sensible and the prettiest——"

"Really, Jack——" She was making poor work of her smile, when suddenly her eyes clung to something—ardently. "My coat!" she cried, getting up swiftly. "See—in the sun—the orange burns—it is on fire!" And forgetting the two men completely, she went over and caught up the glowing thing with a little rush of wonder. Some one had brought it in from the veranda and left it there.

Absorbedly, feverishly, Lilith slipped it on; and

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then stood triumphant, with her arms uplifted, and a strange intoxicated smile upon her lips.

"By George!" breathed Armistead half-fearfully. For the sun blended the masses of her hair into the curling brilliant draperies, sweeping the whole into a flaming halo for the sumptuous tall figure, and melting the liquid emerald of the eyes, until flesh and textiles were annihilated, and the woman seemed pure essence of disembodied light.

Wayne, looking at her, for an instant was filled with the superstition of the old Persians. Something told him to fall down upon his face and worship; habit, innate dispassion, all his weary humour dropped, in that blinded unrealizing vision, and only the mighty self-control of long passivity kept him sane. For the space of three minutes mortal form seemed to have been dissolved, and those two souls stood forth—the soul of the South, sense-imaginative, passionate, pleasure-full; the soul of all that Destiny, so steadily denied that it nearly thought its own self dead; the souls of their ancestors; and the soul of immortal Truth, stating itself in the elemental—met each other's burning glance and knew themselves irrevocably.

But John Armistead did not know them. And with his nervous laugh mortality swept back victorious to its dominion. It was simply Lilith Armistead and Randal Wayne, standing in a sunlit breakfast-room, and wondering at some yards of satin stuff. And—somewhat out of focus—Zona Raimund stood behind them, looking on with youthful, hard revulsion.

"Are you cold?" she asked generally, with an odd, dry little laugh. "Neither of you seem to appreciate that the thermometer has gone up two degrees—according to the secretary." She sat down and began to rattle knives and forks belligerently.

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Wayne walked out of the room with more abruptness than his usual courtesy.

"Never saw him move so fast before," observed Armistead, himself moving with some relief. "Queer old duck, isn't he?"

"He is our host," said Lilith quietly; and while she spoke without a shade of reproach, there was that in her words which made her husband instinctively draw in his feet.

"I wasn't saying anything against him," muttered the self-inherited, for once abashed. "He's a friend of mine, I guess."

"Why?" The crisp question came from the girl at the table. "Why is he a friend of yours?"

"He has been a friend of all of us." Mrs. Armistead had folded up her coat and was standing gazing into the harbour; quite unconsciously she broke her record for silence in a matter of her husband's. "You—we all—are his guests."

"That's right, Zona." John Armistead stopped by the girl's chair and pinched her cheek kindly. "I know he isn't just exactly your style, but Randy has been mighty good to you girls. He's done me a great service."

"Has he?" Now that she herself saw, Zona was impatient of the rest of the world's blindness. "Oh, well——"

"Yes." Armistead closed argument with a firm kiss. "Now, good-bye—take care of yourselves, and keep as cool as you can. We'll leave a week from Wednesday"—he was too busy thinking of it to notice that Lilith gave him only her cheek—"and I really believe Wayne will go with us!"

Zona looked after his departing figure half-pityingly, half-contemptuously. Then she looked at Lilith.

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"How does it make you feel?" she asked curiously, "to have a secret from a trust like that?"

"What do you mean—a secret?" Lilith had gone back to her place by the window. Zona realized angrily that the beauty of her had added to itself allurement. "I have not had any secrets since I was small and afraid of my father. What do you mean by a secret?"

"I fear I could never make my standards clear to you," began her cousin; then—as though it were fairly pushed out of her—"Where were you last night, when I came to find you?"

"I was in my room last night," answered Lilith, without turning. "When do you mean?"

"I mean after the earthquake. I left you in your room not ten minutes before, and I flew up to you, the minute the worst shaking ceased. You were not there—where were you?" The eyes of young judgment paused, suspended.

Mrs. Armistead faced about and met them with an even dignity. Her hair was low over her ears, and she looked very Spanish. One might sometimes be afraid of her, Zona felt suddenly—not of her either, but of those grave ghosts who stood beside and guided her so that their speech was her speech, their reigning passions hers. "You are mistaken," she said, very distinctly; "I was in my room—the entire evening."

And she left the breakfast-room unhurriedly, her long clinging gown lending a quaint stateliness to her grace.

Zona beat her strong little hands together impotently, greatly to Wan Ho's amusement. "Oh!" she said to herself—"oh—h! Who could tell a thing like that that it lied? And yet, last night—there on her knees—she seemed to be going through some struggle, some sense of moral conviction. Perhaps if I had understood

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her better—— " And there came upon her that condemning self-suspicion—the suspicion of having failed a creature at its crisis—than which there is no keener suffering on earth.

" If I could only ask some one, if I could talk it over—— " She ran through the people she knew, with a rejecting swiftness, Winthrop included. Then out of recollection there came a voice she scarcely admitted even to her mind's attention : " When you want me, I am here—even if I am a failure." And she knew that if indeed she had failed, he was the one who could tell her, and sympathize with her. " I will ask him," she decided impetuously ; and already relieved, picked up a book on her way to the garden.

She meant to read a while and then go to the hotel to see Mary. But hardly had she seated herself in the shade of a group of palms, when she saw a familiar long-limbed figure bending over some rosebushes near by. Astonished even out of her dislike, she leaned forward and watched him, wondering what on earth he could be doing in the garden—where he never went except to reach his chair or ricksha. But all he did was to tap the ground between a few of the bushes, and then pass thoughtfully on towards the house.

" Mr. Wayne "—before she realized what she was doing, she had called to him—" may I speak to you ? "

He came back slowly. " Yes ? "

Then she knew what it was she had wanted to ask him. " Are you going to America with Lilith and Cousin John ? " She tried to pierce his half-shut eyes, with the directness of her own. " Are you ? " she insisted.

" Are you ? " he returned, with a smile that flickered into itself again.

Youthfully she grasped at the obvious, overlooking

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the fact that the man whom she analyzed was the least obvious in the world. "I see you are wondering if I shall tell Cousin John. I—I don't think I shall."

"Tell him what?" The consul's even gaze was almost indulgent.

"*What?* Tell him *what?* Why—ugh! How this East sickens me!" And meeting nothing but its Sphinx-like serenity in his steady eyes, she brushed past him—breathless with that conglomerate rage and self-distrust, that wretched East-born resentment of the supreme intangible, which neither her intellect nor angry logic could approach to fathom.

"Zona! Zona!" A fluff of light hair came flying up the path and a small person in blue mull caught the girl with a throttling enthusiasm. "Oh, you angel—you perfect darling! There, let me look at you! A simply ducky frock, my dear—what a relief after these appalling foreign women. Herbert said last night we hadn't seen a woman really dressed since we left home—er—you know what I mean, dear, *chicly* dressed, of course. But if he could see you—that horrid Mr. Armistead persuaded him to take some dreadful trip—Herbert would much rather have gone about to the shops with me, but—oh yes, Ethel Ainsley has a son—now what do you think of that? Mamma just cabled me this morning—rather a useless expense, Herbert said. And—oh, my dear, who is that perfectly wonderful man—did you ever see such a profile? It can't be the consul, is it? Come quick and introduce me—hurry!" The small person, who was also Mrs. Phelps, dragged Zona relentlessly to what she was trying to escape. "He's the very image of a Greek god—I used to be engaged to a man like that once—oh, how d'ye do, Mr. Wayne? I was quite dying to meet you last night. Herbert said you saw me outside the club—

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but he, Herbert you know, wouldn't stop—he's just that way, as stubborn as though mamma were along—well, and—so I'm awfully glad to meet you now, you see!" She stopped, after the vague animated manner Zona remembered so well; one knew that one had but an instant's chance to fill in, or she would be off again.

"I suppose you know Mr. Wayne's uncle, don't you, Mary?" It was an inspiration which Zona welcomed with a new maliciousness. "The Secretary is trying to get Mr. Wayne to come back and lend his valuable experience to guide the Consular Bureau they're forming." Her lip curled with an irony that only she appreciated. The consul was mildly engrossed with Mary's minute blue slippers; Mary was engrossed with the consul.

"Oh, *do* come!" She laid two coquettishly appealing hands on his arm with a little insistent flurry. "It would be simply adorable! I don't know a thing about the Bureau, though everybody's been spoiling the smartest dinners with talking about it—that is I mean, you understand!" Her large eyes besought Wayne confusedly.

"I understand perfectly," he said—meaning it.

"Well, so if you came, you see, you'd be the greatest rage—and from the East and all—Morgan Ainsley—he was governor or something in the Philippines—has been the most popular thing you could imagine ever since he got back from the East; and before that no one paid much attention to him—no one but the fusty diplomatic set, that is—but now, why the whole season simply swings about the invitations he accepts. And if *you'd* come—oh, we could get up some awfully smart parties, and er—found a lot of Buddhist circles and things. It would be quite the most original idea any one's had for ages. You will come, won't you?—

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Now don't forget, I knew you first—people are so unscrupulous about snatching anybody extraordinary!" She looked up at him with the most ingenuous confidence in his sympathy.

This time Zona's sense of humour held back for Wayne to answer. The vision of him, as the centre of a Buddhist club made even her intolerant lips twitch.

"When my uncle browbeats me too unmercifully, I shall remember you, and hold you to the refuge," he promised with that smile that had confounded Mrs. Levering, and the countess, and an infinite number of others before it went out to flutter Mary.

"Then he is going!" Zona decided instantly.

"Will you really? Oh, how perfectly dear of you!" Mary had not lived in the East, to react to the smile less frankly than with her usual animation. "And we'll have a simply ripping winter—Herbert can be as jealous as he likes," she flung back with a conscious little laugh over her shoulder, as she and Zona started on toward the house. "*I* don't care!"

"My dear,"—the minute, or the minute before, they were out of Wayne's earshot—"the sweetest man I ever laid my eyes on—aren't you *mad* about him?"

"Yes," said Zona grimly. "Are you?"

"Absolutely engulfed!" Mary spread her small person in an ecstasy of confession. "Now *there's* one's whole ideal of man as he ought to be—he didn't say three sentences, but one felt that he *meant* a thousand! If Herbert could be taught to smile like that—but he can't. He's just a prosy, correct husband, without a whiff of romance about him. I suppose I must get what congeniality I can——"

"Isn't a prosy, correct husband what you married?" asked Zona, turning about bluntly as they

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went up the steps. "What do you mean by congeniality, Mary?" She had used the word herself until she was rather tired of it.

"Oh, of course I *married* him." Mary's wide eyes opened wider. "One has to marry those, you know. Mamma would have been furious with me—and besides, I'm very fond of Herbert. But there's no poetry to a person after you see his—er—boots and things lying about *off* him! There's no mystery, you know—no glamour. One understands *everything*, long before he even says or does it. It's a little dull. So——"

"So you take your—your congeniality as something aside?" Zona's voice was lightly hard. "I suppose it's the accepted way with married women?"

"Oh dear, now you think I meant something horrid"—Mary's blue eyes clouded unhappily—"and I don't at all! I never do a thing really naughty, like Vylette von Steindorff, and Greta Carstairs; I—there, let's sit in this sweet swinging chair! You see, dear," she patted Zona's hand soothingly, "you never were like the rest of us at Miss Coolige's—you were always so—so clever, you know, so you can't perhaps understand these—these little affairs. But they're quite simple,"—she took off her elaborate lace hat with a complacent finality—"quite harmless: a chance meeting down town some day—a walk, a note or two, and a few discreet calls, when one's—well, alone and rather—rather got up, you know—an exciting contretemps with one's husband, a quarrel, and—that's really all there is to it." She clicked her pretty heels knowingly and smiled at Zona with just a shade of the married woman's patronage.

"That's all there is to it—and you find that worth the dignity, the trouble I mean," Zona added, realizing whom she was asking.

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"My dear, one *has* to do *something!* One can't be at the dressmaker's all the time!" Mary's eyes were making a roving inventory of the veranda—the veranda that belonged to the Smile.

"No!"—and the tone of significant weariness brought back her friend's attention—"no—I suppose there does come a time when stuffs, and things merely to feel and look at, no longer satisfy."

"Why, what's the matter with you, Zo?" The old school name slipped out like an affectionate embrace about the younger girl's loneliness. "What makes you speak so queerly? Aren't you having a good time here? Tell me all about it—why I haven't heard a thing about you yet!" Mary fully believed that it was Zona's fault that she had not.

"Oh, I'm having a good time, yes—I"—she smiled bravely—"I never was very adaptable you know, and sometimes the atmosphere—the Orient——"

Mary leaned forward, clasping her hands about her childish knees with an awed look. "I know what you mean—isn't it too *deliciously* weird? The sandalwood, and the dirt and all, and then those darling serious Chinamen! Oh, I love it—I told Herbert this morning I'd done nothing but shiver with superstition ever since we landed yesterday. And now he's gone up that wild river—I shouldn't wonder at all if he'd come back massacred. They say one often does." She regarded Zona with placid inquiry.

"I've never heard." Miss Raimund laughed—with an odd little catch in her voice.

"Yes—and then last night, wasn't it exciting about the earthquake? I was too thrilled. I said to Herbert they couldn't have given us a better glimpse of local colour if we'd ordered it in advance. Of course Herbert wasn't there—he never is when I want

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to be awfully frightened. When he gave Mr. Armistead as an excuse, I just told him I wagered Mrs. Armistead wasn't as ready to stay by herself during earthquakes as—oh!" Mary broke off, with a slight, amazed gasp. A woman stood in the long window opening from the house—a woman whom to see for the first time might disjoint any one's sequence of thought.

"Is it Mrs. Phelps?" She came out slowly.

"Yes," acknowledged Mary. ("And I felt as though I ought to have brought some incense with me," she said to Herbert afterwards.)

"You are very pretty," said Lilith gravely; and quite oblivious of Zona, led Mary into the light, regarding her as deliberately as one would a doll sent on approval: "very pretty." She repeated this, from one woman to another, most astounding statement with an inimitable low laugh of delight, like a mother's, when she sees her baby smile. "My husband has taken yours away with him, yes?"

Mary had not heard that Mrs. Armistead was foreign, yet she was suddenly aware of it, with that slow-rising "yes?" "I'm sure they're quite all right together."

She "adored" Mrs. Armistead at once, though it was something of a shock that such a "heavenly woman" should have married a mere prosily correct husband. All very well for girls who are pretty, thought Mary, with a wise shake of her pompadour, but for goddesses like this—an affinity was the only logical destiny!

"Your husband seems such a *capable* man! And Herbert has always got out of things—though he did ruin a new suit of white flannels falling into the Bay at Narragansett once. Is your husband fond of sailing, Mrs. Armistead?"

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"I do not know." Lilith's eyes were occupied with each pleasant blue detail of Mary's frock. "I never heard him say."

"Well, Herbert is," said Mary. "He simply lives to buy yachting clothes—he had the *sweetest* dark blue pin-stripe last summer—but he gets rather ill on a boat. We generally go to Bar Harbour. I think I heard Mr. Armistead say you went to Banff in the summer?"

Zona leaned back in her chair resignedly. She realized with some new pertinency that she was without one of these references—that she had no Mr. So-and-So of authority, on whom to shift her motives and appreciations. Not that Lilith shifted hers—for she had none. But through all Mary's chatter "Herbert says," and "I told Herbert," came out as sole traceable motif; and in spite of the little blonde's professed yearning for romance, it was quite evident to Zona that her prosily correct husband was the centre of Mrs. Phelps's universe, and she of his. Yet the domestic unity of it did not attract her. Nothing would have attracted her to-day, she decided, coming back to what Mary was saying.

"So mamma thought we might as well go on around, and come home by Europe, as I'd been so miserable ever since before Lent. Oh a perfect horror of a season, my dear (of course by this time Lilith was 'my dear')—and Vylette von Steindorff asked me to visit her in Wiesbaden where the Prince has a place—you remember her at school, Zona——"

"Fat?" bolted Miss Raimund without compromise.

"We-ell, not exactly *svelte*, but—but awfully good-hearted and that, you know. She married von Steindorff the year after Herbert and I—oh, and by the way, my dear, that scandal about her and the

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Viscount whatever-his-name-was isn't true in the least. She wrote me——"

"I never heard of any scandal"—Zona's voice hinted that she did not care to hear now.

"Um-m!" Mary sounded a trifle dubious—it seemed rather impossible that one should not have heard of a scandal, especially when there actually was one. "I just wanted you to know, you see, as I'm intending to visit her. Where do you go from here?" She put the question collectively, but it occurred to Zona with a whole universe of suggestion, that it was not a collective question at all; that it might be separated, and she freed from this unbearable circle of disgusts which seemed to close about her tighter every day. She was a woman—in her own eyes at least—twenty-three, and with her own fortune.

"Lilith and Cousin John are going to America in a fortnight," she answered distinctly. (Mrs. Armistead's eyes were absorbed with something in the garden.) "I do not know what——" Her message of emancipation was postponed by Wan Ho, appearing bland and imposing in a cap that was even shinier than usual.

"Missee Sopel come downside. Can see two piecee ladee?"

"It is Caro!" Lilith rose at once—as she would have done for no other woman. "I must go to meet her—I beg that you will excuse me, Mrs. Phelps." And she trailed softly away into the house.

"My dear!" Mary was altogether breathless—"you never *hinted* to me she was so ravishing—I never *saw* such a throat—and her hair, and those fascinating green eyes—oh, I shall take Herbert away from here before *he* sees her, you may be sure. It's a wonder Armistead doesn't shut her up in a cell—

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he looks a brutish sort of creature—instead of leaving her among all these thieving Chinamen; they're the ones that have harems, aren't they?"

"Mary, listen!" Zona sat forward hurriedly. "You mustn't say a word against the Chinese while Mrs. Soper is here. Be sure—because she is—er—very much attracted to them. She almost seems like one herself, sometimes."

"Oh—hh!" Mary shrieked enthusiasm. "Isn't it too weird and interesting! Do you suppose she would visit me in Washington next winter, when Mr. Wayne comes? People would be simply wild——"

"You see, I had to take a mission class for Rollo this afternoon and I wanted to see you and Randal especially about the affair." As Caro came out beside Lilith Zona watched Mary with some amusement; the idea of this infinitely slender, infinitely distinguished Englishwoman being imported, as it were, to Washington for a season's exhibit—instead of a new breed of dog or an opera singer—came ridiculously humorous to any one except Mary.

"This is my friend," announced Lilith, with an unusual pause of implication before she added, "Mrs. Soper."

"You see my husband is a clergyman, Mrs. Phelps," said Caro, with a whimsical lift of her fine hands, "such a frivolous one that he's organizing a midnight picnic—for the Mission, of course—to the Temple of a Thousand Steps."

"How weird!" murmured Mary.

"And oddly enough"—Caro turned to Lilith—"it comes on the very night before you go away. Must you really go then, Lilith?" A wistfulness that Zona could not understand crept into the quiet voice. "Can't you stay through the autumn?"

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"Jack says we must go." Lilith's own voice was singularly free from any emotion, though her eyes again were lost within the roses of the garden. "I shall be sorry to go. I have been very happy here."

"But about the picnic, Mrs. Soper!" Zona's crisp reminder broke in abruptly. "I think it's an excellent idea. They say"—she told Mary—"it is the most wonderful sight—a regular Arabian Nights' place, tucked away in the hills, with only one old priest to take charge."

"How perfectly fascinating!" gurgled Mary. "Would they let Herbert and me go?—do say they would!" Her blue eyes besought Caro.

"Of course," said Caro, much amused, "we want every one to go. I just stepped in to make sure Randal hadn't planned something for your last night that would take people away. But as he hasn't, it's all right. Where is Randal?" she added, as she rose.

"Mr. Wayne is in the garden," supplied Mary eagerly—if she could not call him Randal, she at least knew where he was!

"Oh!" Caro stopped, as though arrested by a sudden thought. "You come from Washington, do you not? What sort of person is this uncle of Mr. Wayne's? Is he—er—like him?" She had caught sight of Randal, and was watching him as he came leisurely towards the steps.

"Like him? Well, rather not!" Mary's small face took on every evidence of disdain. "He's the rudest old bear in the Cabinet, and a perfect crank on family. I had to go down with him at the Chief Justice's last season and I simply couldn't eat—he bored me so. Oh, he's an absolute guy, my dear, no more like Mr. Wayne than—hasn't he the *dearest*

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smile you ever—um—um yes." She ended rather chaotically, as Randal came within ear-shot.

"You were talking about me," he accused them solemnly.

"You say so only because we're four women," Caro retorted.

"Yes, that's just what Herbert always says." Mary gathered her blue flounces elaborately from one side of the double chair. "He says it isn't safe to leave a reputation with a woman, even when she has no one but herself to talk it over with. But Mr. Wayne knows better. I suppose you're frightfully spoiled?" she fixed an anxious eye on the profile.

"Hopeless," pronounced Caro gloomily. "Take him in hand, Mrs. Phelps, if you have the power to subdue. I feel that you might really ruffle him a bit," and she glanced soberly over her shoulder at Randal.

"Oh, you wicked thing!" Mary shrieked delightedly. "Fancy putting such ideas into my head—isn't it shocking of her, Mrs. Armistead?"

"Rather irrelevant, since you have a husband," Zona answered, for Lilith; "that is at least supposed to make a difference, isn't it?"

"Good gracious, Zo, what perfectly stupid fraud-fraud! If you go on blundering like that people will know you have never had an affair—and you wouldn't want them to know it, would you? Oh, are you really going, Mrs. Soper? I had such a lot to say to you—won't you——?"

"Anything you like"—Caro smiled down at the fluff of animation with amusement—"only another morning; Rollo and Beatitudes are clamouring for me at the Mission."

"I will go out with you"—Lilith broke her silence

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and her dreamy ease, and rose to follow her friend through the house.

At the door Caro took the lovely face between her hands. "There's something new about you," she said slowly. "Is Randal going to America?"

The other woman, to whom the sequence conveyed nothing, gazed back at the tall figure that was almost up with them. "He wants to go," her voice made each word a *jubilate*; "I do not know if he is going, but he wants to go." Just then her maid called softly from the stairs. "One moment——" Lilith excused herself to answer.

"Do you?" Caro's eyes searched her other friend's penetratingly, as he came and stood beside her in the door.

"Do you want to go?" It occurred to her that there was something new in his face this morning too; his eyes, as they met hers steadily, seemed to have burned the screen of years up, so that at least they saw full view, and without elimination.

It was a new, unevasive Randal who answered her so directly. "I want to go, yes. I want"—his glance travelled swiftly to the woman who stood talking with her maid—"that new self you spoke of, Caro. For—since last night—since this morning, I have come to believe that I might grow into it. I—I am not sure but that already I have gone too far in the development of it to retreat. But"—his smile had in it something that made her turn her eyes away—"the strange freak of this new part of me—the jest which somewhere some one laughs at mightily—is that it's a grain—just a grain—unselfish. The old self has been trying all the morning to persuade me to go to America when—when she and Jack go; but the new self, already obstinate, won't have it. I

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believe after all I shall have to stay here. You are disappointed?"

The grey eyes looked at her for the first time wistfully; he put up his hand to shade them.

Caro also put up hers. "The—the glare from the road is very hot," she explained for them both, rather unsteadily. "No, Randal—I—I am not disappointed. I am very proud. I think you owe something, in return for the new self—and—you will forgive me? —though it hurts, it also rejoices me to see you *suffer* in the payment for it. It has been so long, so very long since you could suffer, Randy. So"—she smiled at him brightly—"I am proud that you are ready to pay for your present, proud that—that you have taken your God of To-morrow by the horns, as it were, and are making Him obey you."

"Then—you won't keep to your threat, and divorce Rollo?" He too made an effort to speak lightly. "You'll stay by yourself as I stay by mine, Caro?"

"I'll stay by it," she promised breathlessly. "By it and by you. And"—as Lilith joined them, she kissed her almost vehemently—"good-bye! After all (it was to both of them she said it) what is any good-bye, but a promise? I often think how stupid we are to dread saying it—when it does but hasten all we want most; is just an interjection. Good-bye!" And she hurried out to her chair.

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CHAPTER XI

A THOUSAND steps! The very phrase itself seems to shoot up beyond sky and space, and totter with dizziness, that is to an Occidental. In the Oriental mind, a thousand steps had meant smooth groups of broad stone ledges, leading up and up into the soft green distance, with all the allurement of the gradual—reaching out invitingly, subtly, with careful experienced arms; reaching out and gathering in.

Up through the labyrinth of trees that hedged each side of the ascent, a little caravan of chairs went undulating; the fitful light of the coolies' swinging lanterns casting grotesque gaunt shadows of the forms that rode inside. It was as though the flickering pendant things conspired, with the midnight and the poplars and that faintly smiling spirit of the East that lurked in all the green pinched pathway, to expose and point a mocking finger at the exaggerated frailties of human flesh.

"Looks like our souls, riding alongside, doesn't it?" Maddox asked Zona, watching the fantastic shadow-shapes beside their chairs. "See how nice and fluffy yours is—that's the way you'll be after you've finished Europe; it was a good idea, that," he regarded her approvingly, "your plan to plunge into the conventional for a space. Mary and a Con-

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tinental health resort and a German near-princess! I couldn't have completed your course better if I'd thought of it myself. By the way, will there be—er—princes and things?"

"When I decided to go with Mary I did not ask," replied Miss Raimund stiffly. "I suppose if there are, one could attend to them."

"Certainly," he made haste to agree, "much more skilfully, I should say, than one could have attended to them two months ago. As your instructor—perhaps (from farther back in line Winthrop's voice came to them just then) I should say more modestly one of your instructors—I feel I have done well by you. You are getting to be a credit to me."

"I wish I felt the same encouragement about you," snapped Zona—to whom his mood came totally incongruous with the eerie expedition they were making, "but I don't. You will probably go on wasting yourself with the same complacency you have shown ever since you left Chicago."

"Probably," said Mr. Maddox—complacently.

"What you see in it—this life out here," she went on impatiently, "I can't comprehend. You're just about as out of place in it as—as I am. If it hadn't come to be an epigram in Hong-kong, I should ask you if you have any notion of ever going back to America?"

"And I should answer you in the epigrammatic way: have you?"

"That's beside the question—and of course you know I have. I'm merely prolonging my trip a little, that's all—since Mary was good enough to invite me to go on with them. But you"—her eyes met his accusingly through darkness—"never came on a trip in the first place. You came on an escape."

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"An original idea of me now, wasn't it?" he acknowledged gracelessly.

"Yes—I am thankful to say. There are not many Americans who when they're beaten run away and confess themselves failures. Most of them stay at home and——"

"So miss succeeding with you! It's been a very agreeable compensation, that." The blue fire swept upon her mercilessly, as they rode along beside each other.

"I hardly see where it comes in." Perversity and Zona had certainly merged identity to-night. "I've been as rude and disagreeable to you as I know how to be all the time—except when I asked you about—you know," she added, her voice dropping almost ashamed.

For she had asked him whether she had failed Lilith that night; and he had answered her so gently, had reassured her so comfortingly, that his real opinion as to her failure had never reached her.

"I know. Couldn't you—er—get worried again—Zona?" It was that same rarely gentle tone that she had heard in his voice only twice before.

"Worried!" The girl's whole harassed soul leapt up into the word. "Get worried——" She broke off suddenly, and listened.

Just behind them Mary and Herbert were holding absorbed argument over plaids and polka dots; farther back Zona could hear Mrs. Twinehurst telling Barbara why Mr. Wayne was not going to America—also what a perfectly *wonderful* present he had given Violet (on whose pink third finger Mr. Jenks had been led at last to place his turquoise ring); and still farther back she could catch just echoes of "*Aren't* you, Mr. Winthrop?" and "He is, *isn't* he, Eunice?" inter-

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spersed with courteous inaudibilities from a voice that struck apprehension to her heart to-night—for to-night she had promised to answer it; while from the very dimmest chairs in the procession—by turning right round Zona could just see them, almost hidden by Mrs. Soper's and her little chaplain's—there came only silence, that great dynamo of control which accomplishes so much more than speech in its persuasion.

Zona faced about again abruptly. "It's hardly a question of getting worried," she said shortly. "I—I do wish Cousin John had come along to-night." Arrived home just before dinner, Armistead had gone at once to "Randy"—and then stalked out of the house to the club, purple with indignation. "He was so furious about Mr. Wayne's not going with them," Zona went on with a peculiar little smile, "that he absolutely refused to even eat dinner with us at the Consulate. Poor Cousin John! I shall be really sorry to leave him to-morrow."

"And your cousin—Lilith?" Maddox suggested, peering at her through the midnight almost wistfully.

"Lilith"—the girl's voice hardened—"scarcely needs my regret. When I told her of Mary's plan that I should go on around the world with them, all she said was: 'yes?'—in that slow, unquestioning way of hers. She seems dazed—almost lifeless, this last week. Oh, I don't think Lilith wants any one's sympathy; she doesn't seem to me to want anything."

"Which is surely the most sorrowful condition in the world," reflected Roger, phenomenally grave as he looked at her steadily. "Don't you think, Zona, that it would be?"

"I'm trying to stop thinking," she laughed recklessly, "I've found it does so little good out here.

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And—please don't call me Zona, Mr. Maddox; I am——" She paused; Perversity again linking arms with her restlessness. "You see," she said deliberately, "I am engaged (anyway—to herself—I'm going to be to-night) and"—she laughed again, lightly—"the man might not like it."

Maddox helped her carefully from her chair—the little caravan had stopped below a wide terrace. "No," he said, very quietly, "I don't suppose he would like it." And he gave her over to Winthrop, who had come up eagerly; watching them go off together, with a stubborn setting of the lips that meant anything but surrender.

The colony had dismounted from their chairs, and were going up the last set of steps on foot—a laughing, chattering score of incongruities, they seemed, now within the shadow of the great temple. Maddox turned resolutely to the most incongruous—Mary, who as she rushed along beside him up the stairs, caught at his arm with an ecstatic shiver. "Oh, isn't it too *weird*, Mr. Maddox! I said to Herbert as we came along those ducks of trees, it would be the most wonderful place to be besieged in—do you suppose there are any Boxers about here? Anyway, Herbert said it wouldn't do, because all our trunks are at the hotel, and—oh, doesn't Mr. Wayne look *fascinating*, holding up that lantern? It shows off his profile simply *weirdly*. I do think (she turned back to Maddox again, with a little pout) he is the most disappointing creature not to come to America; after I——"

"I haf asked Meeses Armistead vhat she tink vhen he does not go," panted the countess, catching up with them on the last step, "und she says 'vhen he vants to stay, vhy shouldn't he?' she says. I tell you, I was surprised, *hein*? It is her husband vhat

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made all ze fuss, vhat called all ze bluffs, no? Und she—she does not care von bit. Vy shouldn't he stay? she says!"

"For my part"—Mrs. Twinehurst brought up an imposing rear guard with Mr. Jenks—"I think she shows exceedingly good taste. I have always said she was a superior person, far too good for him with all that money and no a's of any consequence. Any one could tell from her clothes that she was a lady; and then coming to-night, though her husband stayed home and sulked—I declare I think she's almost too lenient. Mr. Jenks, what about the hampers? After that long ride one feels—ahem!—a bit *gone*." She sat down ponderously on the broad ledge that bound the terrace. With a sigh of unanimity the others sat down too.

"Yes, to be sure—exactly, Mrs. Twinehurst." Mr. Jenks (whose ancestors gave every evidence of being aldermen) looked hurriedly about for some one to share responsibility. Ah, there she was still down by the chairs—the quiet definite person who always did things easiest. "Mrs. Soper!" his voice that made such a good tenor at the little Mission, fell strangely flat upon the temple's great repose. "Mrs. S—oper!"

"Coming!" from the foot of the steps Caro called back reassuringly. "I'll go on up," she told the two who alone with her had lingered there below the little crowd, "and you can come when you are ready. There—there's a path round by the side that comes out on the terrace too; perhaps you could find that." An instant longer she looked at them—the two tall slender forms for whom she felt such yearning pitifulness to-night; then with her quick, twisting smile she also left them and went up the steps.

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They were alone—save for the tired breathing of a ragged knot of coolies.

"Will you come with me?" asked the man gently —"to find the path?"

And Lilith obeyed even that slight suggestion with an instant eagerness; although for many days her response had lagged, and her lethargy had remained unstirred, even by him. Without questioning, she walked with him away from the little group of Chinamen, into the slim shadowy path slit stingily between close hordes of trees. Even had Caro not mentioned it, Wayne would always have found a path where there were apparently only steps; would have found it, and then taken it, while the whole world chose the steps. He guided the woman into this one—this puncture into mystery—as he had guided her from the first, carefully, gradually, reassuring her by the mere fact of his own caution. So for some time they went along in silence, only the faint hiss of many leaves breaking the dense stillness which shawled them about; and Wayne, to whom conversation had ever been a more or less uninteresting tool, found an odd humour in the fact that before this woman who spoke only simplicities, he could not lay hold of the simplest thing to say. Those vowels and consonants that should have served, framed themselves suddenly into inexpressives—silly labels of things which (beside the Great Thing) held no meaning.

And the Great Thing—strange, how he almost exulted in it—she could understand! Going back to that period of his own uncertainty, when he had stood considering her possibilities, hesitating over the development of that which might be less interesting when less chaotic, he was impersonally glad, impersonally proud of this woman of his evolution. In

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the stuffy importance of his American office, Nicholas Wayne might be raging at Randal's persistent non-achievement; but there, within the realm of that evasive spirit, moved a creation that was immortal, a soul whose embryonic crudities Randal had sorted, whose consciousness of self, vague though it yet was, Randal had achieved. Looking down at her in the knowledge of her difference, he could also look back and answer those pleading women who had risen in protest, the hour of his hesitation; whose piteous, scarce remembered faces had begged him to let her remain unaware if need be, but undisturbed at all costs. He could answer them to-night, and that other, too—his friend, out of all that had been his amusement—who had said "she would just talk to Randal;" but he had no need to answer her. For she appreciated. She realized with him the dawning in this soul of his development of that most rarely fine of human emotions—melancholy; that dwelling retrospective perception which is bound to feel its way out of an infinite passion, and justify it. Wayne knew that already, while she was still with him, Lilith was going over the hours they had spent together, remembering their detail, as only the detail-instinctive can, yet fixing their great fact so that later—forever—she might turn to it for assurance. And when she should turn to it, when memory should be all that was left her of her satisfaction, then would come comparison, and redecision, and finally judgment; then would come to Lilith a psychology!

"But the beautiful climax of it will be that she won't know it," he rejoiced. "She will be all-fulfilled, minus the commonplace strain of knowing herself fulfilled; and some one—some man who reaps the benefit—will owe me her destiny, and his." It did

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not occur to him that he himself was even now reaping the benefit, in his enjoyment of the actual new thing he had proved possible; and too, in that new self which still was newer than the one he had long since wearied of. Neither did it occur to him, Oriental though he was, that both her destiny and his were in the hands of those who had gone before and had known the same soul circumstance; of those onlooking spirits of control, whose passion and response they could but reproduce, as from the beginning mortals had been forced to reproduce it. In fact, with uncharacteristic commonplaceness himself, he personalized all his reflection to the point that she was going away—this woman he had grown permanently to enjoy—that she was passing out of his pleasure, in all probability forever.

"If you had possessed the brains of Minerva, you could not have planned a subtler revenge," he told her. "But, graciously, you have not the brains of an Angora kitten—and if you took revenge it would be instinctively and on the instant." Through the darkness his whimsical gaze touched her more lightly than the flutter of the poplars' leaves; yet she trembled. La Bruyère says that the contact which frees men, chains a woman every day more fast. That, I think, is the excuse of heartless women; they are merely self-protective.

"I should take revenge only on some one who attacked you," said Lilith, who would never be clever enough to be heartless. "My mother said that God approved revenge when the man one loved"—her eyes, in their emerald, cut the night—"was injured; that the Church"—she faltered, as through the trees came the glow of temple lamps—"the Church——" Her voice swayed with her body, and she leaned upon him suddenly. She was leaving him to-morrow, and

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that fanaticism she had given in exchange for him, was of a relentlessness she knew too well. "I am afraid," she whispered, strangling her very fear with hands that went quickly to her throat, "I am afraid——" and miserably she shrank against him.

"After you had thrown your cross away you were not afraid," he reminded in a clear, impressive voice. "Don't you remember, you heard my step, and you were not afraid?"

"I remember, yes!" The long hands fell at once against her sides.

"Then if you are afraid again, just think of that—think of my step like this"—it was quaintly absorbing, this moulding of her imagination into value—"and you will forget all about being afraid. Do you see?"

It was his first and last spoken lesson to her, and the temple lights drew themselves in and smiled at the directness of him as he gave it; but the woman's eyes clung to him worshipfully, almost awesomely, as she listened to that step, and said, "I see." And with her listening, the trees seemed to listen too, and to shut out the dim encroaching haze of morning that pried between their slashes. At the last winding of the path the darkness thickened, blotting into lies all presence except black. That gathered up the two tall slender shapes, and wound them about with its soft caressing veil; lengthening and thickening its folds as though to prove its friendliness. It was God and it was nothing, wrapping them close in opaque density—and then, as they looked back into it, it was just black—a contradiction.

With the mechanism of reassuring habit, the consul took out a cigarette and struck a match. The light curled up around the woman's gleaming hair and licked the luminous ivory of her cheek, as though it

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loved that better than mere usefulness. Then it went out.

"You didn't light it," she murmured, thoughtful after the manner of all those about him. "Shall I do it for you?"

"No," he said, looking at her as he had looked at her only once before—in that blazing-lighted place of his realization of her. "No, I have all I want now—though fleetingly enough. Did you say Jack intended taking you back to the ranch at once?"

"Jack"—as they went up on the quiet temple terrace, the woman's smooth voice sounded almost shrill—"Jack—ah, he shall not take me away—say he shall not——" Her hands clutched his arm with frantic eloquence. "I will stay with you. I will do what you tell me—I will be your slave—Randy! Aih—Mother of God!" In the shadow of the temple door, she sank down at his feet.

"Get up, Lilith!" As he raised her, the consul's voice was gentler than it had ever been before.

"You will let me stay—you will not allow him to take me away?" Lilith's throat was quivering with the dominant absorption—plans, complications, what people would say: all the incidentals that would have cropped up in the mind of any other woman in the world passed over her idea without diverting it. She knew intuitively that women must plead, and because she had never pleaded before—except for stuffs and jewels—her ardour gathered an accumulative insistence. "I *will* stay!" she declared, majestic in the dignity of her defiance, as she stood there braced against the temple door. "I *will* stay; may I not?" In an instant all her dignity had dropped and she was the slave again, begging, petitioning, in a pathetic frenzy of dependence.

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"Come inside!" Out of his unfailing knowledge of her, he drew her unanswered within the great bronze door. "Look!" was all he had to say. And immediately the habit of the gorgeous came to reassure her, as he had known that it would. In the midst of that place of pale wrought jade, of filet ivories and splendid teak, and mellow golden lacquer, the purpose of her twenty-seven years summed itself up to oust the newer passion. No wonder that she gasped with thrilled sensitiveness, that her feet stumbled and went swifter, as forgetting Wayne and heedless of the others in the place, she twined her fingers round about one grandeur after another; luxuriating, abandoned—to her God of Yesterday, the exquisite.

And the people who had come to see the temple could see nothing but the woman, gliding through it in soft radiance, fitting it to completion like a long-absent acolyte. Even the old orange-robed priest stirred from his huddled oblivion before the joss, and stared at the barbarian woman, moving so confidently among the maze of amber lamps—his lamps, as all the wealth of the temple was his until Confucius should grant his soul repose. By an odd circumstance the dragon coat which Lilith wore—and which covered her completely—matched the old man's yellow vestments to a singular identity of shade. And when the priest got up and followed her about—a mere wrinkled speck of a human, in an aureole of flame-like draperies—the little group of Occidentals shrank back against each other, in stupefaction at the naturalness of it.

"I feel as though I'm at some show," whispered Mary, for once sincerely awestruck. "It can't be real—and yet it's so real that it frightens me."

"Oh, yes, it's real enough." Zona was watching her cousin with eyes like bright, hard steel. In the soft

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splendour of the temple that absorbed all Lilith's sense-acute perception, even Zona felt misgiving over that dispassionate semi-understanding she had just consummated with Winthrop. Curiously, when it came to the point of an actual engagement, her mind (previously quite made up to take the step) had balked. Her mind? Or was it some less impersonal part of her—that had shrunk back and stipulated cautiously for a mere continuance of the present congenial friendship, with the understanding that in time—after she had returned to America perhaps—it might merge into something more permanent. Was congeniality enough, she wondered? The lurking Smile winked at her from each of the countless temple lamps—was it? was all that the East would reply.

In defiance of it the girl turned back to her clever-faced friend; turned with him and left the glowing altar fire, whose red seemed to beckon—beckon—after they had passed outside to recall, like the voice that had said "Zona" so gently, so significantly; the voice that too had been disregarded, silenced. Out from its influence Zona hurried on to the terrace again and after her the others, all agreeing, a bit breathlessly, that for all its splendour, the temple had been "quite too stuffy."

But as before, when the little crowd had gone its way, three still remained behind—within the place of mystery; a man and woman, whose tall slenderness made them seem almost identical—and then another, an interpreter, whose brows curled upward like her odd un-English eyes, as she spoke so rapidly to the nodding bundle of old vestments.

"He says," she told Lilith softly, "that he must put the altar fire out, because it is time; but you can stay in the temple if you like. You would not want to stay

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though, would you, if the fire were out? It is that which makes it so glorious."

"Yes," said Wayne curiously. "When the altar fire has gone out, these things will look only ordinary—uninteresting. You would not want to stay."

"Very well." With a child's obedience, Lilith was led by the two people who alone had fathomed her complex simplicity; regretfully, but unprotestingly, she let them close her play-house, and take her away, sated with what was already a memory. Between the two—Caro and Wayne—she went down through the temple grove, dreamily pleased with the lights that blew like flitting giant fire-flies past the trees; yet hardly noticing them after all, so occupied was she with the larger grandeur she had just relinquished. It seemed she had forgotten all that went before; that the immediate absorption had routed every other that had claimed her instinct. All she said to Wayne as he put her into her chair was: "My mother never saw such beauty, even when she went to Spain—poor madre!" And then, as she sank back in her cushions: "It was divine—most wonderful—ah, you are good, good!" brushing his hand with grateful, gratified lips.

"Sometimes I almost think I am," said Wayne under his breath, while his eyes clung to her hair, that persistent torch to her perfection, "but purely with the goodness of restraint." And he practised it less negligently than usual, just then, letting her go into reverie; and so from him, as he thought, for ever.

Leaving the silence they had interrupted, the chairs swung down as they had swung up—noiselessly, gradually, creaking an occasional faint reluctance over this injustice to such wealth as stayed there at the top of a thousand steps, in a wood where only a spirit came—a spirit and a muttering old man, who put the

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altar fire out. And as the last two chairs disappeared down the winding grayish pathway, disappeared and faded into outline of what had been, the Smile that had beckoned them welcome, followed them to the end, in clinging, promising farewell; followed them until its shadow slipped into their shadow and lurked there.

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BOOK II

CHAPTER I

ZONA looked up at the gay chintzes of Mary's morning-room, and then back again at the letter she was reading—with a smile that recognised the pathos of the contrast. Chintz, pink and rose-strewn and inconsequential went so well with Mary and her miniature perplexities (during the weeks that she had been staying with her in Washington, Zona knew them to a detail); whereas the exquisite soft cream of Lilith's notepaper seemed to magnify to tragedy the round clear letters traced upon it.

"We are going to Chicago next week (the letter ran) and from there South, as Jack has business. I am glad to go, for it is very *big* out here, and very quiet—never before has Nevada seemed to me so empty—you know? And then since the summer, I have been going to church again; and there is no church near the ranch. Jack says I may go to New Orleans though, while he is campaigning for Mr. Maddox, and then I shall be able to confess once more. Will it not be wonderful!—in the church where our mothers used to go and tell their beads, and pray for consolation? I shall know the very altar for madre has told me of it many times. It is in the Lady Chapel, and there is a picture of Saint Ursula (the saint of all our family,

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you know) and a little lapis cross that madre herself laid there when her brother Diego was so ill. Oh, I shall know it very well! And Jack has said that he will recover our grandfather's house for me—the strangers who have had it will gladly accept his price, he says. Then perhaps you will come down there and stay with me, yes? In the house where our mothers lived as girls together! If only you were a Catholic, Zona—but you are my cousin, and that is very much for me. You must remember me most gratefully to Mrs. Phelps, who took care of you, and brought you home safe to us, after this long year. She is very kind, Mrs. Phelps, and so pretty; I hope we may show her some courtesy while we are in the South. Ah—and perhaps you will see Mr. Wayne's uncle, the Secretary, during your visit in Washington, and his sister, Mrs. Herrington. Jack and I met her at Banff—she is a widow, and keeps house for the Secretary. She has a little boy, I think, though she did not have him with her at Banff. If you do see any of them, please do not fail to add our appreciation of the hospitality so graciously extended to us all in the East. I sometimes think those few weeks in Hong-kong were the happiest of all my life—were not the roses in the garden sweet? And so yellow. Jack says I may have a Chinese amah when we come back—you know I have a cook, Wing Pu, who looks something like Len; and now I am to have an amah. Jack is very good. I am going to ask Mrs. Soper to send me an amah from Hong-kong; I should like one better that came from there. Mrs. Soper says the old priest at the Temple is dead—the one with the orange robe, you remember? I am sorry he is dead. And that girl who wore pink sashes (was not her name Violet?) has married Mr. Jenks. Mrs. Soper saw Mr. Wayne at the wedding, and he spoke to

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her of us. Do you not think it strange, Zona, that in those tiny little weeks we lived so much? My mother said she never found New Orleans wonderful until she came to the North; she said one never found what was wonderful until afterwards—when it was quite past. I understand now what she meant—poor madre! Jack has come in, very muddy after riding somewhere all day, and wants dinner, or I would write more. You know I never used to like to write letters, but I do now—and you are the last, Zocita, the only one to whom I may open my heart on paper. Therefore do you write to me soon—very soon, yes?—that I may have the gracious excuse once more. And at Christmas you must be with me—in New Orleans, if the Virgin grants my prayers. *Adios*—I embrace you tenderly, and beg the saints to guard you in safety and happiness.

"Your affectionate cousin,

"LILITH ARMISTEAD."

"P.S.—If you could see the great silver fox Jack has just given to me! But you shall. It is of a blue like stormy skies, and how it glistens! But you shall see. I have a new blue dress too, velvet; they call it China blue, and I look very nice in it."

China blue! Zona caught her breath pitifully, as she folded the letter; the transparency of the thin pages was such a fatal duplicate of the heart which truly had been opened upon paper. "And to me!" marvelled Zona with a sad little shake of the head. "To me she writes of *him*, the one for whom she lied to me, for whom she deceived her husband—is deceiving him still, no doubt—the one who in return gave her absolutely nothing!" Nothing—Zona is sure; yet one notices that she is no longer occupied with Lilith as an errant from the path of universal law! It is

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"the heartrending unconsciousness of her," which causes the younger woman suddenly to dash her hand across her eyes, with one of her old boyish movements; "the superb innocence with which she bares her tragedy—sandwiches it between New Orleans and the Chinese amah and Jack's muddy boots! One knows how it came to her on the instant that one would never have seen Randal Wayne's boots muddy"—but there was no longer any satire in Zona's smile. It was all compassion; and some understanding. For by this first morning in December she had come by all the scourging stages of self-distrust to that place of promise, whose perspective labels itself alternately the Impersonal and the Satisfactory. In order to admire, to sympathize even, she had no longer to espouse; indeed she was on the point of acquiring that most valuable asset to moral development, the artistic conscience.

It might seem as though this gradual acquisition were rather incongruous with the course of Zona's last year—six months of dwarf frivolity at the regulation papier-maché Continental resorts, preceded by two months' Herbert-and-Mary touristing (which Zona remembered only as a delirium of large hotels and harassed uncertainty over trunks), and succeeded by three more of haphazard visiting and wandering about the large capitals—it hardly appeared on the surface to imply any extraordinary character evolution. Yet the year, though undeniably pin-striped in its allowances, had accomplished a good deal in Zona's evolution. With the thorough it is not development but redevelopment that counts; thorough people simply cannot help going on, but to go back and go over differently is a very difficult process for them. To achieve it something more than usually forceful must

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take hold of them. Something had taken hold of Zona—to make her smooth the thin, ivory-tinted letter with that yearning touch of comprehension—something that had made her forgive Lilith, that had established her on a new basis with the woman who had not found what was wonderful until it was quite past! To track down the exact time of her forgiveness, was to arrive at the period when she began to wish she had deceived Roger Maddox a little less completely. There had been "princes and things," and one had attended to them—so adroitly that had he been present Mr. Maddox might have felt some pride in his tutelage. But he was not present. That was what became more and more the trouble with Zona. She had wilfully cut herself off from him, this impudent failure; not only that, but she had in an access of perversity led him to believe that she had attached herself irrevocably to some one else. It was an acrostic which at the end of a year plagued her the more in that it was entirely of her own making. And now Maddox was again running for office, was according to John Armistead "dead sure" of his election; was, *after* she had ceased to persuade him, once more among the active who were "doing things." While the some one else was still in Hong-kong, preparing—still preparing—to write articles. In the two resultants of that blurred Eastern memory, was wrapped a neat little moral, by no means unobserved by one of Miss Raimund's perspicacity: an Englishwoman with great dark eyes had predicted it to her in the days of Zona's assurance. "Only in perfect idleness does one's main idea come out!" It was beginning to prove itself true, in Winthrop, in Maddox, in Lilith—had proved itself true, to the annihilation of some of Zona's select beliefs, while in herself—— She rose from her chair by the window, with much of

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her former abruptness, and decided to answer Lilith's letter at once. Perhaps it would be the best plan for her to join her cousin in New Orleans—certainly she must do something, go somewhere very shortly. For she had been with Mary in New York and Washington ever since their landing in October; and, besides, a year of drifting had brought out still keener that inherent desire for some definite occupation that had always pursued Zona. Only that morning—to Mary's fluted horror—she had suggested vaguely that she must be settling down soon, that she could stop only a few days longer.

"Only a few days longer—and the season *just beginning?*" Mary had almost shrieked. "My dear child, what can you mean?"

Her dear child (who as an unmarried person had grown used to the appellation) looked back calmly over a bowl of very large pink roses and said she meant she must be getting at something.

"Oh!" Mary nodded wisely. "I know—charity. Ethel Ainsley had a siege of it too; then she got married and had a baby. Well, it's your own fault, Zo, my dear—that dark what's-his-name, Clathrop—Clinthrop, was quite mad about you in the East. Even Herbert noticed it, and he had to be told when he was in love himself—ahem! Yes. Then there was that Austrian, and Sir Harry Delancy—as I was saying to mamma only yesterday you had chances enough. But I suppose all clever people have to go through it—slums and things—though they seem to turn out like everybody else."

"I suppose so," replied Zona equivocally—something, perhaps the letter that was then before her on the table, made her wince at being classed clever. "You don't understand—you are too clever."

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Was she, any more? The snow seemed to fall a little softer, as she stood by the window, later on, and wondered. Was she too clever? And would she turn out just like everybody else? Would she get married?

Not if slumming was the intermediary. When Zona spoke of getting at something, slumming had not occurred to her. If it had she would have mentioned it, for the simple reason that she had never concealed anything of herself in her life. But she had not thought of slumming; she had not thought of anything, except getting rid of her growing restlessness. But how? The brown stone barn that had been her father's house did not appeal to her as a way out; as yet she was far from domesticated.

But there was the letter—there was Lilith, whom she knew, now, that she had failed, enormously, back there in that uncomfortable land of undercurrent. And she was "the last"—the "only one" to whom her cousin might open her heart!

Zona gave the coquettish bows on Mary's curtains a determined tweak apiece. She would go to New Orleans—to Nevada—anywhere, where Lilith wanted her. The astute Mary was not so far wrong when she diagnosed her friend's present psychology: if it was not charity, it was charity's better half—the impetus to serve—which was pushing Zona along, past a considerable deal of prejudice and one-time superiority. It would seem that she was getting to be a woman!

And charming? People thought so that night, when her vivid colouring and quick lithe grace made the sensation of Mrs. Ainsley's dinner. The women—particularly Lucia Herrington—took occasion surreptitiously to pinch their cheeks (those of them who had thought it too early in the season to bother about much

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colour); while the eleven men who were not taking Miss Raimund in, frowned resentfully at the grizzled man who was—a beetle-browed person, old enough to be her grandfather!

"You needn't be surprised *who* takes you down, my dear," Mary had warned her plaintively. "Ethel Ainsley has the most extraordinary disregard for precedence! Now I always—but of course Ethel was a Randolph—of Virginia, you know—and Washington will stand anything from family. If only you mention the Tangueys you're sure to get on."

Mary wondered, when she saw how excellently Zona was getting on, if she had mentioned the Tangueys. But she was sure that she had. What else would have bombarded the moroseness of that old bear who was next her?

And the old bear appeared—for him—most cheerful, almost entertaining. At first he listened to the young woman in the red gown because he liked red, and she looked well in it. Then, by accident of course, she said something that struck him as nearly sensible, at any rate, a laudable improvement on the things women usually say; and he delayed a full half minute over his last spoonful of soup, to answer her. No wonder the eleven other men stared. For a Cabinet Secretary to answer anybody, and as early as the soup! Shoulders went up, envy of the girl increased—Mrs. Herrington—the Secretary's niece—whispered across a Russian attaché to her hostess—and then nodded entire understanding. Everybody knew *she* had found out who the girl was and all that. Society took an olive and settled back; in ten minutes every one would know.

The Secretary began to wish he knew. "You haven't been to many of these things, have you?"

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He asked her bluntly, from under the beetle-brows—Raimund—Raimund—where the devil did she come from?

"No." Zona looked at him with the same brain-racking uncertainty; she had arrived late, and had not even read her card. Who and what was he? An official person, certainly, but—— "No, this is my first Washington dinner."

"Um-m! I was sure of it. You had something to say. Used to have myself, when I was allowed to dine unmolested in my own house. My niece'll tell you—that thinnish woman with the red hair. Yes"—gloomily—"*once* I was a Southern gentleman."

"And now?" Zona's clear eyes twinkled delightfully.

"Oh, now——! All that a Cabinet man can be, I suppose." For some minutes he munched his cucumber, looking intensely dejected. Then: "It's the sort of thing a person can't anticipate," he meditated, "or that if he does anticipate, he thinks will be charming! But I tell you honestly, my dear young lady, if anybody had had the Christianity to tell me beforehand the average number of dinners a week that go with the position of Secretary of State, I——"

"Oh!" Zona sat up suddenly straighter. "Then you're Randal Wayne's uncle?"

"Well?" he acknowledged irritably. "As far as I can see, that only makes it the more unbearable. Expected to eat out, and be agreeable seven nights out of the week, with a nephew like that! Did you ever see him?"

"I stayed in his house for two months," said Zona slowly. "Mrs. Armistead is my cousin, you know."

"Humph! So that's why Ethel sent you down with me. I will say she's more thoughtful than most

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of them—visited Randy for two months, eh? Then he *is* out there!"

"Oh yes, he's out there." Zona's quiet definiteness fixed Randal and Hong-kong, planted them cohesively yet very distinctly at last in the Secretary's mind. "He's out there." Her unconscious repetition confirmed all of Nicholas Wayne's discomfort at not having been able to get Randal away from "there."

"Do you mind telling me," asked the Secretary humbly, "what you think he sees in it? I've been ten years trying to find out."

Zona Raimund glanced about the long table. Very vividly there rose before her the vision of another table, of a group of suddenly animated residents, stumbling over each other's defence.

"To some people there is nothing so compelling as a perfectly effortless spirit," she told the Secretary a little breathlessly. "Out there it is—quite effortless."

"Just what I thought!" sputtered the Secretary. "Developed into a lotus-eater, has he? Ah, well—I'm disappointed. The Family will be disappointed. They all—his sister Lucia especially—were very fond of Randy; Lucia named her boy after him."

"Was that the boy Mr. Wayne spoke of—the yellow-haired one who was two when he came away?"

"Yes"—the Secretary brightened—"my grand-nephew; did he mention him? Poor Randy!"

"In Hong-kong they said he was very proud of all his family," turned Zona, guiltily conscious that it was Mrs. Twinehurst who had said it; and wishing that she could somehow get the Secretary away from that moribund way of speaking of Randal. Though she did not know what the consul was, she knew he was not moribund. "My cousins are very fond of Mr. Wayne," she put forth the present tense determinedly. "Cousin

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John—they roomed together in College, you know—and he are—still good friends." To herself the statement was of a sinister significance; but to the Secretary it seemed to bring some cheer.

"Yes," he said, eating beef and potatoes with a twofold satisfaction, "Armistead was no end good to Randy. I really thought for a time that he was going to win out. But"—he relapsed into gloom again—"it was no good. As you say, with some people——" He regarded her sharply. "You aren't a suffragette, are you?"

Zona laughed. "No; why?"

"Your talk's so connected, that's all. Now Lucia, my niece, has always said Randal was a Bohemian—a born Bohemian"—he glanced at pretty faded Mrs. Herrington with a sort of mild scorn. "Whenever a person holds opinions different from Lucia's, she says they're Bohemian; that is, if she likes 'em. But you say it's laziness, eh?—acute *dolce far niente*, and all that sort of thing?"

Zona caught Mary's sparkly blue eyes fixed upon her. She thought of the Smile. "I hardly know what to say," she faltered. "I—I can't say. There is something about Mr. Wayne—something——"

"Just so," acceded Mr. Wayne's uncle dryly. "I quite agree with you. Something!"

"Laziness isn't exactly the word that fits it," Zona went on, talking half to herself. "It's hard to find a word that does fit Mr. Wayne—except mystery."

"Yes, he's mysterious enough," agreed the Secretary grimly. "If you could tell me the reason he turned down that Bureau—you know about the Bureau?" he asked her.

"Oh, yes." Zona did not add, as a year ago she would have added, bluntly, that all Hong-kong had

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known about the Bureau. "I think that in the first place you sent him into the wrong atmosphere," she told the Secretary frankly. "Probably he never was what in America we call ambitious; and over there in the East, even people of enormous energy grow inactive, negative. So of course a person naturally that way—and Mr. Wayne was, wasn't he?"

"Oh, he was always perverse," his uncle returned impatiently. "Even when he was a child, he never took any interest in things—children's things. Dal, Lucia's boy, is just like him; I can assure you we'll never send *him* to the East. And"—thoughtfully—"you're right; I ought never to have sent Randy. But I didn't know what to do with him; he'd been so er—remarkably active in all the ways he shouldn't, that——"

"Of course," she interrupted sympathetically, "you thought you were doing the very best thing possible for him. And that's just what you would have done, had not his mind been curiously congenial to the Oriental philosophy. It has been that which has spoiled your plan (she sighed a little; it had spoiled other plans as well). It has become such a part of him that he feels instinctively that away from it he would be an alien. I think"—she looked up tentatively at the keen experienced face—"if you would suggest that he use his own method—if you would ask him to come to America, to the Bureau if you like, but with the understanding that he should go about things after his own fashion—the Oriental fashion it would be, of course—you might get him to come. It might be that he would find the idea amusing—ah! (as the diplomat's face darkened) that makes you angry! But you must remember that he has another set of motives from yours; if you frighten him off with talk

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about ambition and progress, you know"—her shoulders went up expressively—"but if you put it in the light of an experiment, I think it might appeal to his Eastern imagination. Out there they love nothing so much as working out a problem—provided they can baffle everybody with the indirect way they do it. It's their—well, we call it inscrutability; but how do we know what it is?" Flushed from her long speech, perhaps more from the consciousness of her new appreciation that it brought her, Zona sat back, all of a sudden very shy.

"Um-m!" The Secretary of State gazed at her, almost in humility. "You're right; how do we know? But look here"—he leaned toward her gratefully (by this time Society was leaning forward too)—"you're the first woman I ever saw in my life that knew anything, and was still modest about it. This idea of yours about Randy sounds clear as a trumpet to me; I'd never thought of it that way before. And if you'd explain a little more—if we actually could make it work"—he fairly beamed upon her—"I must have Armistead and his wife to stay. Will you come with them?"

Zona smiled at him, frankly pleased, as she pushed back her chair. "Of course I will," she said.

And for the first time since his widowerhood, the Secretary confessed to having enjoyed a remarkably short dinner. For once, Randy had done something for him. And he would certainly have them all to stay; he did not know Armistead (except by cable), but the fellow had been extraordinarily considerate of his ambition for Randy, and—yes, by all means, Lucia should write the very next day and ask them for Christmas. Meanwhile the girl might come to dinner; there had been no chance to tell her about the idiot he

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had had to put in as head of the Bureau in Randal's place, but he knew she would sympathize. Such a sensible girl! The way she put things was really remarkable! And she had shown him the most deferential attention, not always craning about at the less mature (the Secretary never said younger), weedier men. Though he was a little over sixty—*Who's Who* had him down as sixty-nine—and weighed a trifle over two hundred (a trifle of thirty pounds or so), she had seemed to enjoy talking to him.

"You have conquered my uncle completely," said Mrs. Herrington to Zona in her gentle tired voice, "and I do so want you to tell me about poor Randal. You must come to us informally very soon, will you not? Of course you know I live with Uncle, and poor Randy used to. You see, Randy was my only brother"—and she unwound discursively into a graceful reminiscent ramble to which Zona had only to attend and agree—when she remembered.

It soon became apparent to her that that was the most—all, in fact—Mrs. Herrington demanded of people; that they agree. "You understand what I mean?" she would say; "and I'm sure you have often felt that yourself, haven't you?" One suspected that not even her husband had been able to say no to her. She always gave all adverse arguments beforehand, summing them up with a distinguished little air of contempt which was apt to voice itself in "Now of course you don't believe that, do you? Of course you see my point?" And if ever one did not see her point, she dismissed him sorrowfully, as she had evidently dismissed poor Randal, spoke of him thereafter as of one who had been born a little lower than the angels of her conviction, and so had died—inferior. The humour of her method was delicious,

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when applied to Wayne; the corners of Zona's mouth twitched as she listened. As a brother, he was for Lucia Herrington the subtlest irony of fate's invention; only black itself could be more negative than he.

"And I named my boy after him," lamented Lucia, "my only son—Dal, we call him; he's eleven now, and so handsome. Not unlike poor dear Randal either, as Randal used to be, though I would have wished him to resemble his father—you see why, of course? My husband died when Dal was so young, and while I've always been devoted to Randal, in spite of his erratic ways, I naturally would have preferred—but you understand, don't you? The Family think I'm quite right."

"Certainly," Zona assented vaguely, and, she felt, weakly. Then and there she made up her mind that she would not always assent.

"But you haven't told me a word yet about your visit to my poor brother." Lucia Herrington was convinced that she herself never talked except to "start things," just to put people at their ease. "And now Mrs. Ainsley is going to sing—dear me! And I was just going to ask you about that fairy princess cousin of yours; I met her at Banff, you know, and found out quite by accident that her husband knew Randal at college. You may imagine how delighted I was, she and I agreed so perfectly, and to think that since then she has been two months in Randal's house; really, it's almost unbelievable. You think so too, don't you? I mean——" But she was never permitted to say what, as Mrs. Ainsley began to sing, and (as Lucia would have put it) cut her off.

But on the way home she told the Secretary that Miss Raimund seemed quite as much annoyed as she, to have their chat interrupted. "For a moment she

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had such a hard little smile on her lips," said Lucia, "almost grim—you know the kind of smile, don't you?"

And the Secretary for once said "Yes" to her without despising himself for saying it. He did know the kind of smile, had it not come to Zona's lips when she spoke so definitely of "out there"? Instinctively the old diplomat felt that she too had suffered thwarting at the hands of that elusive obstinacy that called him uncle; she too had been baffled, beaten perhaps, in some effort to get satisfaction out of Randy! The Secretary warmed to her; they must talk things over more minutely. Already the speedy sense of intimacy, involved in a shared defeat, made him look upon this girl as an ally. Perhaps, though it was almost too dazzling an achievement to let oneself contemplate, together they might get hold of Randal! After that—the Secretary hugged himself in blissful anticipation—he could die in all the pomp of an assured self-respect. And the Philippines and Japan, and all his other problems as Secretary, could go to the devil! He would have conquered Randal.

His step, as he left his carriage, was almost buoyantly elastic—for a man a little over sixty—and he went into his house whistling softly.

Strangely enough, at that very moment, on the other side of the world, another man went into his house—with an echo of the same enthusiasm; went in out of the broiling sun, with the circular of a steamship company in his hand. A little brown dog ran after him—ran, though as a rule he ambled indolently beside—a little brown dog with a hard round head, and drowsy, watchful eyes that blinked indulgently upon his master's odd activity. "A trifle hectic," he seemed to say, "but then, mercury's gone up two

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degrees to-day—he'll get over it." And he trotted resignedly by the tall master's side, to a cool rose room upstairs, where everything was dark and quiet, and singularly deserted; save for a few fans lying about, and a hideous little bronze god, exquisitely carved, upon his pedestal. The tall man went over and took up the god with his slender long hands; took it up and carried it downstairs himself, and placed it in a box. "Every one must burn one some day," the little brown dog heard him murmur. "We will burn it together—a year under ashes is long, very long. Better a tormenting flame, though in the end it puts itself out. Three weeks, and then Christmas. I suppose the Family will have to congregate as usual, and then—the New Year; that is it, the New Year."

And again he went back to the rose and white room, and stood in it for a long time. Again he lifted something in his hands—a black crucifix that had grown dusty where it had rolled under the pedestal of the bronze god. But this he did not take with him when he left the room. He merely laid it gently on the shrouded bed and went away.

That night instead of watching the lotus in the garden close up, when it came sunset, he watched the great sampans in the harbour hoisting sail. From the coolest corner of the veranda the little brown dog watched him uneasily. But this evening not even the scratch-scratch of a persistent pen caught his attention. His fine grave face, with its new sweetness, remained turned towards the West.

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CHAPTER II

"DIDN'T think myself Lil 'ud go, y' know," John Armistead told Maddox, as they swung down the long station platform. "She was so all-fired keen to have Zona meet her in New Orleans for Christmas, since I've finished up the deal for their grandfather's house, but——"

"But you are to join Miss Raimund now, are you not?" The wistfulness that always made him seem very much the boy, crept into Roger's blue eyes as he asked the question, "You will see her very soon?"

"Sure! We ought to hit Mobile Tuesday night, if we don't get stuck anywhere; those Southern railroads, though, are just about as dependable as—a Chinaman! Say there, Lil"—the contempt in his voice changed to anxiety—"ain't that bag too heavy for you? Here, better let me take it."

But his wife kept tight hold of the small alligator bag she was carrying. "It is not too heavy, no," she said evenly, continuing to walk behind the two men—just a pace.

"She looks tired," said Armistead to Maddox in an undertone. "Lately I've been downright worried about Lil. Don't know as I ought to have let her in for this busy week in Chicago; but she seemed to enjoy the shows, and shopping"—his honest dog-eyes gathered worry as he looked back again at her. "See

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here, Maddox, just get her into the train and look out for her a minute won't you, while I check the baggage? I'll be back in a minute."

"Are you glad to go South, Mrs. Armistead?" asked Maddox, when he had settled her in her compartment, and arranged some cushions for her. "It is your home, isn't it? And you will see your cousin."

Lilith looked at him directly for an instant. She liked him; he had been in China. "It is my home, yes; the home of all my family. But I am going now to Mr. Wayne's home. I shall meet Zona there."

"I see. You will meet Zona—Miss Raimund—in Mr. Wayne's home!" Because he knew that the significance of it would never reach Lilith, Roger said it significantly as he felt it. At the end of a year the two women were meeting again, in Randal Wayne's home; again, but Roger knew, differently. For Zona must have gone within the consul's boundaries this time voluntarily. That in itself meant a revolution. As for the married woman—— "But Mr. Wayne will not be there," he finished simply.

"No, he will not be there." The married woman's smoke-gray eyes met Roger's without self-consciousness. "He will not be there. But he used to be there." Her delicate white face flushed a faint pink. "When he was a little child he played there, by the great magnolia trees, and when he was a young man he came always with his friends to spend the vacation. It is his house."

"And Jack says there is to be a big family reunion this Christmas." With an infinite compassion for her eagerness, Maddox held to the absorbing subject. "With all those people—Wayne's people—how are you and Miss Raimund going to find time for each other?"

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"Zona is my cousin," answered Lilith with a conclusive finality, "and (her voice gathered passionate intensity) I want to see her more than anything else in the world."

"So do I!" said Roger Maddox solemnly. "But —she's engaged to another man."

"You mean Mr. Winthrop. Yes. I do not know if she is engaged, but I tell you she does not love him"—again the woman of instinct gave her sure verdict—"she does not love him, though she loves —some one," she concluded with a slow positiveness; "I know, because she wants to see me too."

The breath-taking frankness of this revelation passed Roger almost unnoticed, so occupied was he with that other suggestive disclosure.

"She does love some one? You are sure?" He bent towards her eagerly as Armistead passed the car window.

"Did not she write to me, 'I have been very lonely?'" The dull gray eyes lighted with a sudden understanding. And Roger stared at her. Lilith reading between the lines!—truly the miracle of miracles had befallen. He forgot that now, as heretofore, she read only what sense—one or another of them—had woven for her into experience; kept on forgetting it, when she turned to him very gently, and added: "You love Zona, yes?"

"Yes," said Roger gravely.

And then Armistead came back, and the train went, leaving Maddox just a waving black speck in the distance.

"Corkin' good fellow, old Roger." Armistead was bustling about the small compartment off Lilith's. "Don't believe you mind his hands and feet any more, do you, Lil?"

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"No," said Lilith quietly, "I do not mind them—at all."

"And he's going to get the election all fine and dandy"—having arranged his bulky luggage, Armistead came in and sat down beside his wife, swinging his stout legs with satisfaction as he talked—"I've seen to that all right. I tell you what, Lil, that week I put in in Chicago was the heftiest seven days ever I sweated through! But I've left everything shipshape for old Roger, and I dare say he'll remember it and put in a good lick for Nevada later on, if I should ask him. Gad, I often think what if he had stayed out there in that perspiration box and gone to seed like Randy—just because he didn't get what he wanted right at first!"

The woman opposite looked out at the drab winter country for a long moment before she spoke. And when at last she turned her eyes, her words came as sluggishly as reluctant drops of the gray lead. "What was it that he wanted right at first—Randy?"

"Randy? Oh, I dunno what *he* wanted; it was Maddox I meant, you know. Randy—why, I don't suppose Randy ever wanted anything. If he did, you may be sure he got it. Never was a chap to give up anything, you bet—in the days when he had the gumption to want it! though I will say he was generous enough at college. Zona said the little chap's a lot like him, didn't she?" Armistead gnawed his under lip thoughtfully.

"Yes"—the gray eyes lightened. "Yes, she wrote, 'I have been to tea with Mr. Wayne's sister and have seen the boy, Randal—though they call him Dal—and he is very much, oh, so much like Mr. Wayne." This time the words came easily, eagerly, as though they had been repeated many times. "I am glad

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we shall see the boy, Randal," Lilith added softly, lingering over the full name.

Armistead looked at her uncomfortably. Always before he had been able to satisfy that note of wistfulness in his wife's voice, had taken a large pleasure in supplying the want it implied, and supplying it instantly. But of late—since they had come home from China—he had found to his bewilderment that he had lost his science of detecting what she wanted. Apparently, after all, Lil was not as easy reading as the daily paper! And the fact of it bothered John Armistead's self-confidence not a little. A materialist himself, he had, according to the shrewdness which with him replaced education, sought a materialist in marriage; had, in his own language, desired a wife who "liked what he liked." And many times he had flattered himself that, with his unerring instinct for acquiring, he had obtained her. But lately—he stole another glance at the pale dreamy face, half turned from him; it had not used to be so pale, so almost fragile. The man who had gloried in the possession of it could understand the exotic, had understood and ministered to it; but the ethereal—that offshoot expression of the dawning spiritual—was to him an unintelligible and a disturbing riddle. Blindly, out of his crowded hours, he strove to fathom it, to unravel this "new wrinkle of Lil's"; but beyond a lessening interest in the handsome presents that he gave her, and a more ardent devotion than ever to the Church, Armistead arrived at no fixed basis of solution. And so, for the first time in their life together, she was making him uncomfortable; but only occasionally, at times like this, when for a little while he was cut loose from the market and the mine, from politics and getting more money.

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"Funny thing, wasn't it, how Zona got to be so thick with the Secretary all at once?" he suggested, always falling back on conversation—that is monologue—when uneasiness threatened. "Never'd seen him before, y' know, and couldn't stand Randy, no sirree!—not for a second; but seems that the minute she and the old chap laid eyes on each other, they took to each other first rate. From what Zona wrote you, I reckon the niece, Mrs. Herrington, don't cut a sliver with either of 'em—and when we met her that time, y' know, Lil, I didn't think she had much go in her. Kind o' languid and with no ambition to speak of; like Randy, only she didn't make you mad. One thing she showed any spark about as I remember was that son of hers; seems he ain't like the rest of the family, or like the part of it she wants him to be. Said he was hard to manage, and—er—temperamental. Don't you remember?"

"No," said Lilith, to whom at Banff Mrs. Herrington had merely been some one who admired her clothes. "She—she is not fond of him, then?"

"Sure she's fond of him," returned Armistead cheerfully. "Thinks he's got all the other boys in creation lookin' a little off their oats, and all that; but—well, we'll see when we get there. I guess he's just an ordinary kid, that's all. Lots o' parents, y' know, like to think they've got a mighty hard job in raisin' their child—like to hear folks say they deserve a great deal of credit, and all that. I expect we'll find this Herrington boy just an ordinary kid."

Lilith sat upright and looked at him with a peculiarly direct gaze out of her long, clouded eyes. "I do not think we shall find him ordinary at all," she said decidedly; and then turned back to her persistent contemplation of the sunless, leaden sky.

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"Well, I'm damned!" exploded her husband under his breath. Never in all their nine years had she ventured a dissenting opinion, had she disagreed with him. Was he not, in consequence, an accomplished monologuist? And now over an unknown boy, somebody else's kid! "Well, I'm damned," he repeated softly, staring at the back of the lovely averted head.

Then he took a roll of newspapers from his bulging pocket, and in five minutes forgot all about her. Nevada South-western had gone down a point.

The train—"undependable as a Chinaman"—sped on and on; noiseless (or almost noiseless), smoothly relentless, as a Chinaman, through the darkening December afternoon. The woman whom it was bearing to Randal Wayne's house watched it accomplish the iron-bound miles, as she had used to watch patient brown feet paddling over the dusty road to the Consulate; but—"Mr. Wayne will not be there." The long eyes wandered to the man who would be there, and their heavy gray film thickened, as though to push back and conceal the menacing first murmur of resentment that was brooding behind it.

Then, deliberately, expectantly, as the dream-enslaved reaches for his hypodermic syringe, she took the little alligator bag in her lap and opened it; setting the few simple objects it contained on the window-sill beside her. There was a curious carved ivory ball—in which sometimes she had come to see wonderful pictures—and a beautiful brass box (which after all Jack had not given her)— and then a jade rosary, that had come to her at Christmas last year together with an imposing mandarin's ring for Jack —that had come (so strangely!) the very week she

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had decided desperately to go to church again. It ran through her fingers mechanically, her lips moving in accompaniment; but soon she put it down, and took up the ivory ball that had used to make her forget how hot it was, and that now—was it not odd? —made her remember—many things. Some one had laid a long thin quill beside it, the day she was going away from Hong-kong; and she had carelessly gathered up the insignificant thing to be packed. Now it made her chief pleasure, and for hours she would sit patiently probing through those round tantalizing punctures into the heart of their inner mystery. If only she looked long enough, she could see back, back, back into that which was quite past; into a garden with its yellow, yellow roses, and its mysterious closing lotus flowers; into a high white veranda with many cushions and long languorously inviting chairs; into a cool rose room, where now a crucifix, now a marvellous bronze god kept guard beside the bed; into another room of light where something in her exulted every time she recognized it; and then into a gorgeous glowing temple from which she seemed never to have come away—for there the pictures stopped.

And the grave, oh so beautiful, face—the long, graceful body that moved through them all, beside her—at the last it was always that she saw, it was that which was the heart of the inner mystery.

So the smooth-hastening train sped on—toward Randal Wayne's house—carrying the man oblivious behind "Financial Markets," and the woman sunk in the secrets of the punctured ball.

* * * * *

In Randal Wayne's house—say rather now, his uncle's house—a great many people were gathered.

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They were all the Family, but to the boy who stood in their midst, who had to look up at all of them, they were just a great many people. Uncle of course (who would ever have thought of insulting the Head of the Family with an additional Christian name?) and mother—standing next to Zona, who by this time was his devoted pal—these three were all well enough. But the under-uncles, and the under-uncles' wives, and the seven unmarried aunts, to say nothing of an outer hedge of cousins—almost the entire thirty-five, it seemed, all whispering and talking secrets—surely, surely there might have been fewer of them Dal thought, as he stood a little apart, surveying them gravely.

And soon more were coming! Not more of the Family, but friends—friends of Uncle Randy's, that shadowy person whom he looked like, and in whom he was ardently interested; but about whom his mother did not care so much to have him ask, or talk. Dal was certain he would like Uncle Randy; he had never lumped *him* with the under-uncles. Until Zona came from Europe, and got to know Uncle, there had been no one to whom he might confide his ardent imaginings about the far-away namesake; but Zona not only listened, but could tell him—how Uncle Randy looked, and about his house with the garden down below, and his little brown dog that knew Chinese—really wonderful things Zona had told him! But now her family was coming—perhaps she would not have time to tell him any more.

Leisurely Dal went over to her, and stood in silence but very near, while she finished hearing the tallest of the unmarried aunts—Aunt Edmonia—tell how cold her room was, and no water taps! Then he stood on tiptoe and said to Zona in a low voice—he

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never whispered, or drew a person's head down—"Zona, isn't it almost time? Jonas has lit the candles, and see, it's quite dark. You said they would come when it was dark."

As she looked down at him, Zona's eyes were very soft and tenderly bright. She knew why he wanted them to come—more people; not because they were her family. "I think they will be here almost directly, dear. At half-past five, you know, and now"—she drew him suddenly across the great dark-panelled hall, for an old-fashioned carriage was rumbling up the drive.

The under-uncles straightened their ties; the unmarried aunts—to an individual—caught up very dressy bits of fancy work, while those who belonged to the four under-uncles patted their best frocks (Lucia had told them about the gowns at Banff), and strolled—oh, so carelessly—to the window. The carriage drove in under the carriage porch, and Jonas threw the door open. Mrs. Herrington and the Secretary went out to meet it, but Zona stayed with Dal, just inside.

There were inaudible greetings, then a quick little hurrying sound; and a tall, marvellously slender woman stood upon the threshold. The under-uncles gasped. Even Zona caught her breath—she had forgotten there could be such exquisiteness. And John Armistead as before, quadrate and substantial in the background.

"I am glad—so glad to see you." With a tremulousness she had never known before it was Zona who first spoke and took Lilith in her arms; at a glance she had comprehended the fragility which nonplussed John Armistead. "And you—you are a little glad to see me, Lilith?" The new shyness,

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wistfulness almost, came straight from Zona's consciousness of her unsympathy at the time when Lilith needed sympathy most.

"I—I, why"—Lilith laughed deliciously, while the smoke of her eyes was drenched—"you are my cousin, my Zocita, whom I have again. I am——" She stopped, for her very abruptly. "Who—who is that?" she stammered; then without waiting for Zona to answer—"It is the boy, Randal," and with a little half sobbing sigh she was on her knees before him, her passionate possessing arms about him.

For a moment Dal wondered why his eyes were wet, why it was the most wonderful moment of his eleven years of life. Then he knew. It was because he had found a grown-up whom he had not to look up to!—the most beautiful grown-up that even his beauty-loving soul could have conjured into vision; and she was there beside him, on his level, looking straight into his round grave eyes, calling him the name he loved—Randal! He kissed her exultantly—he who never kissed even his mother, when he could get out of it. And then he unfastened her fur and helped her off with her coat; the lovely colour had faded, and she was rather white.

"We will take her upstairs, you and I," suggested Zona, in a voice not quite steady. "After the long journey she will like to lie down for a little, and you shall bring her some tea. You would like that?"

"Yes," said Dal reverently.

"A true Wayne, is he not?" laughed his mother, looking after him as he carried Lilith's fur carefully upstairs. "I suppose there never was a Wayne insusceptible to beauty?" She faced the buzzing group of aunts lightly, though always a little languidly.

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Jonas—who in the servants' quarters occupied the position of head uncle—had spirited Armistead and his bag down one of the mysterious shadowy vistas that wound away like ghostly ribbons, from the great candle-lit hall; so that for half an hour at least, first impressions could be safely indulged in. The Secretary and Mrs. Herrington talked in low tones by the bow window, forgetting to drink their tea; while with the aunts debate narrowed down speedily to the cost of Mrs. Armistead's silver fox, and whether she was unhappy without children. Just as Aunt Edmonia was about to carry this triumphant point for the seven spinsters—namely, that no woman could be unhappy if spared the greatest nuisance of married existence—Dal appeared on the landing, his round hazel eyes narrowed speculatively. Only a moment he stood there, embarrassing them by his unwinking, meditative stare; then he went to the dimmest corner of the dim old hall, and stayed there until dinner-time, a new, rarely sweet smile upon his lips.

Upstairs the two cousins—who themselves were all their family—sat together on a low divan, and talked stumblingly—almost excitedly—as they had never talked together in their lives before. Both of them, you must remember, had been very lonely.

"And you will go on with me to New Orleans, yes?" asked Lilith breathlessly, when they had talked of the boy, Randal; of Zona's odd, quick friendship with the Secretary, whom she was just now obliging with some urgent Dutch translation for the new Bureau, which was not only incompletely but incompetently organized; and—most lengthily of all—of the East and Caro, and Mrs. Levering and the Lorrilard girls; of every one except the consul

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and Wyldon Winthrop, whom by common evasion they passed over in silence. "You will go with me at once, when the holidays are over, and we will stay through Carnival—through Carnival, in our grandfather's house!" Her lips were softly parted; some of the lethargy had gone out of her eyes.

"At once, when Christmas is all over," promised Zona, with a good deal more enthusiasm than she had been able to summon up that afternoon in Hongkong when Lilith had proposed the plan, "I shall have finished the work for the Secretary by then, and—Cousin John will have gone campaigning with Mr. Maddox. By the way—you saw him in Chicago?" Zona's voice was the epitome of carelessness.

"Yes. He was very kind; we talked about China." Again the long eyes filled with melancholy. "He thinks you are engaged to some one else," she concluded simply.

Zona felt her cheeks grow bright red. "Oh!" she said feebly, guiltily. Then, "It doesn't matter in the least," with some of her old brusqueness. "I must go now," she added, rising as though out of patience with herself, "and I will ask Mrs. Herrington to send your maid."

At the door she paused, hesitatingly. "You—you are all right, Lilith—you are happy?" It was a trite question, but the candle on the dressing table had flared up, and emphasized again the almost transparent pallor of her cousin's face.

"Happy?" Lilith turned from the mirror where she was taking out the heavy pins that held her hair. "Who is happy? I think it is as my mother used to say—we know that we have had happiness in losing it. The priest says I am happy." Underneath her level voice was a note almost of sullenness. It was

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evident that this theory of the priest's placed him inferior in her respect.

Zona looked at her for a moment. Then she went over and put her arms about her. "Must the priest always know?" she questioned under her breath.

Lilith's long eyes met hers fearfully. "If one goes to confession, they must know. For—for a while I did not go to confession. Then after I came home I was afraid, and at last I went. My mother said at last every one goes. There is something—I cannot tell you—I do not know—but there is something that makes us go—makes us!" Her voice had sunk almost to a whisper, and her hair had fallen, to frame her dull eyes as fire frames smoke, curling down about it until the two blend into paradox. She looked like some brooding thing of mystery, some Melpomene through whose cloud of strange simplicity one could never pierce.

Zona shivered, wondering what actually went on back in that thing Lilith called her mind; she knew that Lilith could not have told her. There is something literally maddening in the thought that there exists a unique soul, a soul without replica at least in our life circle, and that it can never express itself to be found out; that it will always remain enigma.

"I am glad you are here with me," said Zona nevertheless. "I—once I interfered; it was because I did not understand. Since then I have had to learn there is a great deal we can never understand, but which we have also not to condemn. If——" her old frankness came back, as the only vehicle for comprehension with Lilith—"If you and—and he were led to care for each other, there must have been some reason for it. I cannot think that he was wholly an Oriental. There *must* have been some personal

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quality in him, and in that case"—she looked long at Lilith—"one could hardly blame either of you. Don't *please*"—as Lilith was about to speak—"tell me you don't know what I mean—I—it would hurt me more than I could explain to you."

Lilith caught the girl to her in a fierce impulse of gratitude. It seemed as though all the Spanish of her came out in rare exposition of whatever passion. "I know what you mean," she whispered in quick, sobbing breaths. "I used not to understand you when you talked; but now I do. You mean"—her voice sank still lower and the words were told slowly, reverently, like a rosary—"you mean—Randy!"

"Yes," said Zona gently, realizing that this was the first time Lilith had dared to say the name as she felt it.

"I love him," Lilith asserted proudly. "My mother said that some day I should love, and now —*Dios!* it has been many days—many days. I think"—wistfully—"he loves me too?"

"Yes," Zona returned again. She simply could not resist the pleading of that childish questioning inflection. Besides she felt half shamefacedly that she wanted Wayne to love Lilith; what could it be that had come over her—Zona?

"There in Hong-kong"—the soft liquid confession went on—"when you were away, playing tennis or at parties, we—we were together. We were—God of my soul!—we were happy, I tell you! You will know it one day, such happiness; all of us, the Tangueys, must know it. I myself"—her voice dropped quiveringly—"have almost forgotten. No, that is a lie. I remember—I remember quite well; enough so that life is for me a hell of memory—yes, yes—a hell, or worse, a slow, never-ending purgatory broken

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by the penances the priest imposes. The priest! The Church!" she looked about her terrified, but only for a second. "What are they, any of them, beside the man one loves?"

"Say there, Lil, have you seen my shirt protectors?" John Armistead's head was thrust through the inner door. "Forbes says you gave 'em to the maid to clean, and now, by Godfrey, they can't either one of 'em find them! This thing of having servants—it's just like a couple of helpless children to look after. Oh, hello, Zona—didn't see you—what do you think about it, eh?" It was a habit of John Armistead's, asking people what they thought, and paying not the slightest attention to what they answered.

As a matter of fact Zona didn't answer anything for a minute. Her imagination was pinned, fascinated, by the square, thick folds of Armistead's neck, where it rolled over his shirt; by his cuffless red hands and his honest red face. And the contrast of it with the finely etched picture she could conjure up against the consul's verandah, and with the still vibrant ardour of those words—"the man one loves"—took her wits, by its grotesqueness.

"I will send Agnes with the shirt protectors," promised Lilith evenly, while Zona was finding her tongue. "They are in my smallest trunk. Is that all you wanted?"

"Why—yes. Yes. I suppose that's all." He stood in the doorway a moment longer, plainly dissatisfied, and—plainly again—not knowing why. Then he shut the door heavily and went back to his room.

"I must leave you and let you dress," began Zona, afraid to trust herself to more confidences, her own

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ideas left swirling. "To-morrow we can talk all day."

"Very well," said Lilith obediently. Her face still lighted at the mention of dressing. Then she drew Zona to her again with a sort of clinging intensity. "I used to be afraid of you—you were so clever—but now I only remember that I love you. You are my cousin."

And involuntarily Zona thrilled. It gave one the sense of the glory of proud race, that inimitable stateliness with which Lilith mentioned a mere family relation. Incidentally she had acknowledged, shown herself aware of, the entire change in the girl during the year since they had separated. "I love you," she repeated, kissing Zona on the forehead with a lingering tenderness that showed change in her also. "And my mother loved your mother—they were girls together. There, go, *carissima*—or I shall cry. It is stupid of me, but sometimes, these last months, I cannot help crying. Go—go very fast"—she sent Zona to the door with little pushes of insistence—"I will get Agnes and dress. Yes, yes, I will dress."

And as Zona shut the door she saw the cloud of red-gold hair spread like a veil of concealment, while Lilith's head sank down upon her breast.

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CHAPTER III

THE Secretary and John Armistead were walking up and down the broad drive; had kept on walking for an hour and a half, through the heavy penetrating mist. "Yet you say that at one time he almost promised you to come," the Secretary looked up sharply. "Then what the devil could have happened to him after that?"

"Dunno, I'm sure," returned Armistead gloomily; "I went away."

"And when you came back he was the same as ever—obdurate, immovable—but always good-humoured, confound him! Oh, I know—you don't have to tell *me*, though it has been ten years since I've seen him; didn't I have it all to go through with before I packed him off out there? Don't I have it to go through with now (his clever lined face grew troubled) as though Dal were his son, instead of Lucia's! I tell you, Armistead, it's a something foreign, un-American, or we'd understand it. Perhaps some ancestor way back——" He thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and frowned thoughtfully.

"Eh?" Armistead glanced at him stupidly; *he* had no ancestors.

"Yes. That's the only way I can account for it; and when I talked with Zona"—the minute he found she was a Tanguey, the Secretary had claimed relation-

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ship instantly, and began calling her Zona—"she thought the same thing. Fact is, I believe she suggested it—remarkably sound judgment for a girl!"

"Yes, hasn't she? I always said Zona was damn clever." Armistead did not remember he had said she was "too damn clever"; the minute a faction or an individual found approbation Armistead was always sure he had approved and appreciated it from the first. "Been doing some translation for that Bureau, I understand?"

"She has." The Secretary drew a deep breath. He did not tell Armistead how she was helping him in a still more important thing—a plan for recovering Randal. "If you could have seen the muddle it was in—and the Party down on it with both feet, all along. Cornish, the addle-pate I had to give it to when Randy wouldn't take it, has made a regular elephant's job of the organization, and, for all his experience abroad, scarcely knows Italian from Hindustani! She—she can switch one language into another as fast as you can swear; and when a long Dutch document came in, with no one in that Bureau who could put it into English, why, you can imagine I jumped at Zona after I'd discovered what a wonderful linguist——"

"Awfully glad she's helping you out," interrupted Armistead cordially, stopping to kick some gravel off his boot, "awfully glad. But of course it's A1 for Zona—being down here, over Christmas, with Lil and Mrs. Herrington and all—guess Zona's nothing to complain of."

"Ahem! Being with ah—Lucia might—yes, I think after a time, might furnish ground for complaint; that is if one happened to have a fondness for holding an opinion of one's own, and expressing it at decent

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intervals. But as for Mrs. Armistead"—the beetle-brows bore down upon Armistead with mixture of impatience and kindliness; some pity also, perhaps—"You know, Armistead"—said the old diplomat—into whose experience had sifted the tragedies of a great many married people, and whose sharp old eyes had not been inactive since the arrival of the Armisteads—"I married a beautiful wife, like that—all the Waynes have fancied beautiful women—but I had no time for her; and so she died. At least I thought that was the reason. But afterwards—there were some letters—I found that it wasn't for me that she died, but"—he spoke very quietly—"for some one else. That was thirty years ago; but I remember—very distinctly. In the end it was not for me; but in the beginning—I—you will pardon me, Armistead—both women were so beautiful, the one called up the story of the other."

"Lil is a beauty, ain't she?" returned Armistead, innocently wondering why the Secretary should apologize. "Been married to her nine years, y' know, and by Godfrey, she's prettier than ever. That's right; prettier than ever,—though she's looking a mite thin just now. Got kind o' lonely on the ranch, I guess."

"That's what she seems to me—lonely," said Nicholas Wayne thoughtfully. "By the way, did she go to the church with the others?" Directly after luncheon the entire Family had trooped off to decorate the little country altar; for to-morrow would be Christmas. Generations of Waynes had always trimmed the Christmas altar of the tiny church just out of Mobile.

"Think Zona said Lil had decided not to go with them—wanted to lie down or something."

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"We might go in and see. She may be all alone."

The chill mist was now almost a rain; up the drive the stately old house loomed phantom-like out of the fog that embraced it. "I'm with you!" cried Armistead, feeling his dripping coat collar. "Let's go in, and get a drink. Got so stirred up talking about Randy, I didn't realize how darn bleak it was gettin'."

The Secretary looked at him queerly for a moment, but said nothing as they tramped along up to the house together.

* * * * *

"And so the great toreador was slain; but that night Paquita, the girl who loved him, as she dressed for the dance, hid his sharp knife in her gown and——" the thrilling low-spoken words came to them tensely, as the two men opened the big hall door.

"Hullo! You down here, Lil?" In the deepening shadows of the vast hall, Armistead peered about for her.

"I thought I heard your mother tell you to go to the church, Dal." The Secretary spoke somewhat shortly, as he discovered the boy close to Lilith on a pile of cushions in the ingle-nook.

"I think perhaps she did tell me," said Dal vaguely, with that serene, undisturbed expression that always nettled the man Randal Wayne had beaten. "You see I heard Lilith say she was going to stay home."

"That's no excuse," returned his uncle. "And—don't call Mrs. Armistead Lilith—it's very rude." Abruptly he turned on his heel, and with no remark to Lilith herself, followed John Armistead in search of his drink.

"Is it rude—Lilith?" asked Dal, very low. "Mustn't I call you that any more?"

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With a fierce little movement of adoration, she caught him to her.

"You shall call me that, yes—my most wonderful—that or anything you like. You shall call me anything you like, *si!*" Her lips touched his hair lingeringly. "And now for the rest of the story, no?"

"I would rather hear about Uncle Randy, do you know, Lilith? The others will be coming back so soon, and then you will not be allowed to talk to me"—always he treated her as himself, to whom permissions were granted or refused; for even in these short two days he had come to think of her as subject to the elders—like himself. "Would you mind very much—telling me more about Uncle Randy?"

Would she mind? Slowly she drew the childish face—that yet was not all childish—to her, framed it with her exquisite long hands, and gazed at it; gazed at it until even Dal's unembarrassed hazel eyes threatened to blink astonishment. And "Randy!" she murmured hungrily; and then again, over and over, "Randy!"

And Dal waited patiently, until at last her hands loosened, and she began to tell him. He had thought Zona's stories about Uncle Randy absorbing—the garden and the high white house and the little brown dog and all—but now, when Lilith told him, it seemed as though Uncle Randy himself were there, so tall and quietly smiling. When Dal stared into the fire he was sure that he *was* there, or else that he and Lilith were far away in Hong-kong, listening to the "oh, so entrancing" voice, and waited on by the sleepy Chinaman with the red-buttoned cap. Dal knew he would like that—far better than being with

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Mother and Uncle, who were continually and depressingly disappointed in one; far better than being garrulously ordered about by Jonas, who, Dal privately thought, took liberties. So he huddled closer to Lilith's side—the lonely little boy, whom the Family pronounced a strange child, very, and quite, er—uncannily precocious—and listened with all the ardour of his starved passionate imagination—his secretly nursed worship of "Uncle Randy" making his changing hazel eyes very bright and his brown cheeks flush in the firelight.

And the flame seemed to halo them about—the lovely slender woman with her gorgeous hair, and her white arm curved so adoringly protective about the slim young figure—seemed to gather them up and jealously seclude them there against the purple pillows and the dark wainscoting of the lofty old hall. Did it not take pleasure, the spirit of the glowing fire, in emphasizing that glorified world apart, in which these two were dwelling—in leaping up as a radiant barrier secluding them from the uncertain dimnesses that held possession of the rest of the ancient place?

The woman who loved warmth and light and the quick gleam of compelling beauty, drew nearer instinctively to the ruddy blaze; drew the child nearer as she herself had been drawn, long, long ago—when *she* had stood a great-eyed, listening child, beside the couch of a sad, marvellously graceful Spanish mother, and heard the charmed story of another world. How men had died and gone to hell from desire of a woman's slipper, how girls had pined away or taken the veil out of grief for a lost lover; how husbands had shot themselves and wives gone mad, all for the sake of a swift jealousy—these were the strange dramatic tales with which the ardent exile filled her child's imagina-

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tion, while her tragic dark eyes lost themselves in the one bit of brilliancy New England granted her, the glowing open fire. It was her only form of consolation—this story-telling—poor creature; and besides in the South children grow up among such things. There is no repression even of speech, in the lands where love in its full passion rules undisputed, and trifles—a rose, a knot of ribbon, a man's spur—are more than life or death. So the child Lilith had grown into an odd sophistry, which languished later, when the story-teller disappeared. Now, out of the layers of years that had passed over to obliterate them, the thrilling tales pushed themselves up into remembrance; to be retold, but with a difference.

Through all her mother's philosophy—if such a large instinctive creed could be called philosophy—the clearest fact that came back to Lilith was extravagant fidelity to the dominant absorption. Husband or lover, bull-fight or a new mantilla—whatever at the moment was uppermost, demanded entire and intense concentration. With the boy Randal and herself, she found ecstatically, there was no division as to the subject of their absorption. Paquita, the toreador, all the caballeros of romance and chivalry, were pushed into the background, to give place to that persistent unobtrusive image that possessed them both.

"And a consul never has to work, does he, Lilith?" Dal interrupted once. "I heard Uncle say Uncle Randy never did a dashed stroke of work in his life!"

"Of course he does not work," said Lilith proudly. "Are there not servants—a secretary? He is too wise to work, *caro mio*."

"But once he had to go to school, and learn his lessons?" Dal pondered, a bit doubtfully; that

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seemed to him very hard work, quite unnecessarily hard work.

"Of course. All boys go to school, do they not? Else they would never grow up to be gentlemen." With which simple explanation, Lilith smiled at him adorably.

"But after they are gentlemen, they never have to work at all?" The anxious round eyes raised themselves in some suspense to the face he trusted absolutely. "Never?"

"Never," she assured him seriously.

"Ah!" He lay back with a sigh of satisfaction. "But Mr. Jack works," he remembered suddenly—"I know, 'cause he told Uncle he'd worked so all-fired hard that week in Chicago, he 'uz about tuckered out." Again the round eyes rose in inquiry; very solemn inquiry which went deliciously with his exact mimicry of John Armistead's large importance. "And Mr. Jack's a gentleman?" The rising inflection just hinted——

An odd little shudder ran through the arm that held him. "Mr. Jack's family have always worked," said Lilith slowly, "to get money, you see." The money that had purchased her release from New Hampshire; that had been used so simply yet so lavishly for the recovering of the home of her ancestors—the money that had brought her eventually to Randal Wayne, and so to the boy Randal!

"And Uncle Randy doesn't need money, I s'pose—will I need money, Lilith?"

"No, my most dear, no—no; you will never need money, you—you can be just a gentleman like him, like Uncle Randy." Something in her voice trembled a little.

Dal took her hand and squeezed it hard and put

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it to his cheek. "Then I shall be a consul," he said happily, "and live in Hong-kong with my little brown dog named Wrinkles."

And though she said nothing, he felt that Lilith approved. That was the best of Lilith—better even than her beautiful face and her stories of Uncle Randy. Mother and Uncle had constantly to say things, to express their disapproval; but Lilith could make him feel that she approved, without saying one word! Dal gazed at her worshipfully, from time to time, as they sat for a long while in silence.

When the aunts and every one came back, he stole away by himself. He was indifferently aware that he was not popular with the aunts. Lilith was; did she not show most proper and continuous respect for the entire house of Wayne—lend it an added dignity and prestige by her mere manner of mentioning it? Had she plotted with the wits of Cleopatra, she could have devised no more subtle means of ingratiation with *his* family; even Aunt Edmonia (who was sixty, and wore a good deal of figure) pardoned her beauty; Aunt Mary Tuttle—Tuttle, to distinguish her from Aunt Mary Hortense, who belonged to the third under-uncle—taught her a most difficult seed-stitch; and Aunt Anastasia, who was literary (or rather, wrote for the *Sunday School Beacon*), was secretly making a story about her.

"And what have you done with yourself all the afternoon, Princess Person?" Lucia went up to her with her pretty tired air of graciousness. "Has my unruly son amused you? But of course he has; my meek abdication shows how truly fond of you I am, doesn't it Zona?" turning to the girl as she came up to them.

"Yes, indeed," answered Zona—who by this time

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had given up the struggle—to say no. "The church is lovely, Lilith—you should have gone with us, but perhaps——"

"I will go to-morrow," promised Lilith, answering her unspoken wish; she had made up her mind that to-morrow, Christmas Day, she would go to his church and pray for him—in the place where he used to go and pray. It was the church of heretics, but the priest would have to absolve her. She would do penance. She had made up her mind.

"Are you tired, my Zocita?" she asked kindly, as Zona sank down into the nearest chair, without taking off her furs.

"No—oh no." Zona glanced about abstractedly. The aunts were fussily extricating themselves from mountains of wraps; some were having tea, others warming themselves by the fire; cousins and under-uncles swarmed the immense hall. Surely, she thought like Dal, never had there been so many people; and still, the person one wanted—with all her thorough, intense soul, she wished she had decided long ago to try a failure. "The very charity of it will keep you pleased with yourself," she heard a cheerfully impersonal voice saying. And in spite of her help to the Secretary, in spite of her new affection for Lilith, in spite of her having worked hardest of all, at the church that afternoon, Zona was not pleased with herself. "I—I wish we had a home of our own," she whispered, almost fiercely—as Lucia Herrington went on upstairs. "All this year, all this last year and a half I've been living about in other people's homes—crowds of people's homes—oh, Lilith!" She, who had meant only to serve, looked up at Lilith with appeal in her eyes.

With all her new-born loyalty, she feared that

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Lilith would not understand; was she not too simple?

Was she? From her place against the balustrade, she reached her slender arms to Zona's shoulders—in the midst of the many people they were singularly alone—and "You have been very lonely," she remembered, looking long and comprehendingly into her cousin's eyes. "When one loves, and one's lover is not there, it is very lonely, *si*!"

Zona started. What did she mean—how had she guessed?

"But it would be no better in a home of your own, were he not there," went on the sweet throbbing voice. "No—it would be only very big; very big, and very quiet! Why," she asked wonderingly, "do you not send him word—let him know?"

"Let—let him know?" stammered Zona, surprised out of all self-possession.

"Yes. You are not married." The unconscious finality of this was sublime. Was there another woman in the world who could disclose a whole tragedy in four words, like this woman—without brains, without cleverness—almost without intuition?

"I—I could never send him word," said Zona—in turn paying her cousin the compliment of knowing what she meant. "It—I simply could not bring myself to let him know."

"And so you stay here with these people"—for that moment Lilith's stormy eyes swept the Family of Wayne, where they were congregated at a safe distance, with an infinite scorn—"though you are free, and he is free, and there are just a few—a little thousand miles, perhaps, between you! God of my soul! (the green shot vivid, vindictive, from her eyes) and that, *that* you call love!" She gathered up her long

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grey gown and vanished up the stairs, so quickly that it was violently as well; but her last indignant words spoke themselves over and over to the dazed girl she had left.

"That, *that* you call love!"

"Come—come, this won't do; we must stop this." Zona pulled herself together with a sort of reflex common sense, and took a cup of tea from Jonas. "Christmas Eve, and a big family dinner on, and one of the guests in a fit of indigo blues!—Not at all," stoutly. "Zona, you sentimental cry-baby, you've made your bed, and now you must lie on it with a becoming smile—though it's as hard as hammered nails!" And with a grim little setting of the stubborn lips, she went to dress.

For centuries—and that, in America, implies forever—the Waynes had dined on Christmas Eve in the great hall which had been the entire house of the first Nicholas Wayne, who came as cavalier gentleman to Alabama. As he would tell you any time of year at all, Jonas had laid the imposing table there, "yeahs an' yeahs an' yeahs ago, long foh' you wuz bawn, chile,"—though you might by chance be an octogenarian, with seven or eight great-grandchildren. To-night he laid it with the same tremulous care that he had laid it ten years before—"las' Christmus Massa Ran'al him home," muttered the old man, rolling the whites of his eyes sorrowfully, as he set the company place. "Heaben sen' he don' stay 'way so long no mo'." For Jonas was one of the few people, the only one almost, who believed that Randal would one day come back; to Jonas as to Len—as to all his inferiors—Randal embodied all the pride and the traditions of the grand seigneur.

"Suttin' shuah he come," the old negro would con-

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tend obstinately. " Ain' I tuk care o' him since he wuz a blinkin' lil' quiet baby? Shuah Massa Ran'al come. Ain' you s'pose he done goan a git married? I tell yuh all, pretty soon we goan a see Massa Ran'al come a lookin' fer his bride!"

And though they laughed at him—the servants and Miss Lushya and Massa Nick—he was more and more positive. To-night as he stood behind Massa Nick's chair, watching them all file down to their places, " dem chillens," his wistful old eyes kept turning to the " comp'ny place," ever set ready, at Massa Nick's right. If only Massa Ran'al might occupy it to-night! He sighed—so profoundly that Nicholas Wayne halted in the reunion speech he always made at this time; halted and looked at Jonas for a full and most embarrassing minute before he went on.

It was a boast of Nicholas Wayne's that he had never sat down to a Christmas Eve dinner, without having at least thirty-five of the Family about him; this evening there were forty, including the Armisteads and Zona, and the intense pride that thrilled the Head of the House as he glanced down the long brilliant table made up in full for the exasperations of his position at other times. It was a dazzling little company that stood against the high carved chairs and listened to him giving the traditional reunion toast—for if all the women were not young, there were few of them who were not fair, or who at least showed brave traces of not altogether faded loveliness; and if all the men were not as handsome as the stern old Secretary, there was none of them who was not tall and well set up, in his faultless broadcloth and pearl-studded linen.

" And so we come together again," said the Secretary, a bit unsteadily, " two hundred and fifty-seven

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years after the first Christmas Eve, when Nicholas Wayne of Warwickshire ate dinner in the house that he had built inside this room. And we are all here—every one of us; except Randal," he added slowly. "But if we cannot have him with us this Christmas season, we are at least permitted to have his friends, his guests who have sat at his table with him, as now they are to sit with us." He stopped; next to the extra place at his right Lilith was standing, superbly wonderful in her pale opalescent gown. Her bare white arm was thrown caressingly about the shoulders of Dal, who by a special dispensation was to sit beside her; but it was the rest of her attitude, rather, which caught the Secretary's eye and robbed him suddenly of speech. It was as though she stood in her own house, on her own ground and received acknowledgment, homage. The ivory of her skin shone luminous and softly tinted, the warm live glow of all her hair was wound into a crown of almost majestic stateliness; the long perfect lines of the marvellous goddess-figure seemed to have lengthened to lend her an imperious height and dignity.

"Poor Randal!" murmured somebody, affectingly. They supposed that Nicholas was too much moved by all he had gone through for the wayward one, to proceed just at once.

"Yes, poor Randal," murmured everybody else in doleful concert. "Eating his Christmas dinner among pagans, unbelievers—Ch——" it seemed as though they all sneezed "Chinamen!"

And as they glanced instinctively toward Nicholas for comfort, the great hall door opened and closed. And there, out of the thick cloud of mist into the haze of light stepped Randal Wayne, and his little brown dog.

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Do you think I might come in?" he asked modestly. "It's the Christmas reunion dinner, is it not, and I haven't had time to change. I had planned, you see, to steal in and surprise you in the dining-room later, forgetting that we always feast once a year in the old hall. Well?" as nobody said a word, "I mayn't then?"

Of a sudden the Family recovered. Nicholas Wayne started forward, wiping the beads of astonishment from his forehead; but some one else was too quick for him. It was Dal who darted across the intervening space, and threw himself into his hero's arms. "It's Uncle Randy!" he shouted, his young voice quivering with a wild joy. "Uncle Randy—he's here!"

"Undoubtedly," affirmed Uncle Randy, who stooping looked into Dal's face searchingly, "and by a fortunate trick of luck you are here also, and of rather more imposing dimensions than when I last saw you."

He had really seen none of them as yet, for coming in out of the fog, the whole room could seem nothing but a dazzling glaze of light. Now however, when Jonas had left off shaking his hand and he had rescued Wrinkles from an imminent extinction underfoot, he began to look about. There was Lucia, who had always mildly bored him—having hysterics; and Aunt Edmonia, still with an ill-matched bang, and of course Uncle Nick, who hung on his arm and stuttered incoherent questions like any one but a Secretary of State and Head of a Family. And then—incredulously he came up to the table, and for the second time in his life consciousness of himself left him utterly—who was that, gazing at him from her height of more than human, whom else in all the world had the Great

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Trickster endowed with that curious green flame that flashed to him, instantly?

Zona, watching, with her heart in her mouth, saw the two move slowly towards each other, saw their hands meet, and their eyes blend—for one interminable, nerve-racking second. Then John Armistead hurried up, and interrupted.

That night Randal Wayne ate his Christmas dinner in the "comp'ny place" between his uncle and the guest who had sat at his own table, with him. And Lilith sat like an empress, between the two creatures to whom she was entirely slave.

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CHAPTER IV

"THEN you really weren't living in momentary danger of attack?" quavered Aunt Mary Tuttle, paying no attention whatever to her chicken à la Maryland. "Since that frightful Boxer trouble, you know, dear Randal, I haven't had a minute's peace about you. Oh, I know, Anastasia, there are missionaries,"—as the contributor to the *Beacon* started to speak—"but if you—er—slice up a missionary—as one hears they do out there, every day or so—I daresay the missionary dies just like any one else. And there Randal would be!" she finished triumphantly—"alone, amongst savages!"

"And a consul's post is *so* precarious," appended Aunt Mary Hortense, glancing at the third under-uncle for reinforcement, as she invariably did when making a remark of her own—"so strenuous in every way, is it not, Brother Nicholas?" seeking further endorsement from the head of the family.

"It is supposed to be," confirmed Brother Nicholas dryly—by this time he was recovering from the stupefaction of his own surprise.

"And to think"—Aunt Edmonia turned to John Armistead, flustered out of her throaty impressiveness into a disjointed treble—"you saw him in the very thick of the danger, toiling there among a mob of heathen cut-throats"—every aunt at the table shud-

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dered—" for the protection—the unselfish protection —of his country. You saw him!" She surveyed Armistead with a kind of solemn awe.

" Oh yes—yes. I saw him; er—sure, yes—I saw him," said Armistead hastily.

Zona coughed.

" So like a Wayne," murmured Aunt Millicent reverently, regarding him who an hour before had been " poor Randal "—a phantom, the pathetic derelict of an otherwise gallantly piloted Family. " Always the untiring soldier of fortune, the gallant slave to duty, no matter how distasteful." From her far-away end of the table she smiled worshipfully at him. She was the youngest of the seven unmarrieds, and pretty.

Though he did not hear what she said, Randal smiled back. And the aunts—wedded and single—were subdued to eternity. The Smile, in America, was just the same.

" I shall recommend this post-graduate to all prodigals," he said gravely. " One is beautifully self-satisfied, under the glamour of a ten-years' absence." He looked up at Nicholas Wayne with the faint, enigmatic humour that had wafted itself many times from Hong-kong to the State Department. " And the Bureau? " he inquired attentively.

" We'll talk about the Bureau after dinner," replied the Secretary gruffly—doing his best to convince himself that Randal was nothing but the youngest nephew, a cub of thirty-three, whom he himself had sent away " in disgrace " ten years ago. It was strangely difficult now to connect " disgrace " with Randal. " Did you come home for good—have you notified the Department? "

" I believe the secretary did "—Randal was care-

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fully relieving Mrs. Armistead of the bon-bon dish that shook suddenly in her hands—"my secretary, you know. A most satisfactory person—to go away and leave." His narrowed slate gray eyes met the eyes of the boy Dal for a moment, and he smiled into them whimsically.

"But you are home permanently now, Randy, aren't you?" his sister called from her place at the foot of the long table. "That is, you'll go away just for short trips and things—when other people go. Of course you've made up your mind to go into the Bureau with uncle—you agree with all of us that it's the wisest thing?"

Randal regarded her reminiscently. "I didn't use to agree, did I?" he said meditatively. And in spite of his impatience the old Secretary grinned. It was not so bad when Randy beat Lucia. "I used to be rather a—ah—Bohemian. But perhaps—it is only an idea—perhaps I may be different from what I used to be. I'm sure Wrinkles thinks so, ever since I left cool drinks and Ping's pop-overs—of which he always got the last bite. Wrinkles is not much of an American, in winter." He looked about for the little brown dog—who was watching him unwinkingly from the warmest corner of the most luxurious fire-place. "A creature who finds only the superlative worth the candle," murmured his master, bringing his eyes slowly back to the superlative creature who had been his guest. "*Belissima!*"—her favourite tool of expression; had he ever heard her use the comparative of anything? Was she not too elemental, too uncomplex to deal in any but the great (and so, seemingly, exaggerated) passions of life? Besides, what had she to compare with? Only what "my mother said," and the limited, though,

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to be sure, dynamic experience of one brief year and a half.

"Do you remember your ugly old God of To-morrow?" he said to her—and his own voice sounded strange to him, as he met the light of the long green eyes—"I have brought him to you again—I wonder" —the narrow gaze probed her—"if you will find him still beautiful?"

Every one was listening. It would have been a risk—with any other woman; but Wayne knew that it was not a risk.

"My ugly old god—that was most beautiful?" cried Lilith softly, her whole face radiant. "You have brought him—ah!—and my crucifix," she remembered suddenly, "did—did they ever find that?"

"I did not bring that, no," he said gently. "I thought that with the god, you would not want it," he added in a lower voice.

"No." With the childish trust of Dal himself, Lilith regarded him. "You are right. With the god—my most wonderful God of To-morrow—I shall not want it."

And again Zona drew a deep sigh of relief as some one—Aunt Edmonia this time, with a profound question about heathen images in general—interrupted.

Dal had wanted to ask if Uncle Randy had brought him anything—not that Uncle Randy's coming was not of itself enough; but, he thought wistfully, if—just supposing he had remembered—some funny little Chinese charm, or long-tailed kite like Lilith said the boys over there used—some tiny bit of a reminder of that Hong-kong he knew he should love, where one day he meant to be consul.

Dal sighed anxiously. He was very much afraid

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Uncle Randy had not remembered. But as they left the table, a warm soft nose rubbed against his ankle, two sleepy brown eyes looked expectantly into his—as though to ask protection from this noisy room full of Americans. Impetuously Dal stooped and picked up the small appealing form; it was Wrinkles—the little dog who had been born in Hongkong, and knew Chinese!

With the dog in his arms, he crossed unobtrusively and stood by Uncle Randy. Wrinkles looked from one to the other of them, and wagged his round brown head instead of his tail—as most dogs would have done. It was an odd joke, this having a master of whom there were two; an extraordinary joke, pondered Wrinkles.

"Quite too—er—emphatic, the resemblance," murmured Aunt Edmonia to Lucia, aside. "I do think though, my dear Lucia, we have been mistaken about Randal; he seems to have been leading a most active, useful life, during his long absence. And practically among cannibals—desperadoes!" She fumbled nervously at her bang.

"Just what I have always said," returned Lucia, with her most gracious air of acknowledgment. "And now you all agree with me, don't you? Dear boy—he confesses, himself, he has reformed." She looked over at the chastened Randal as though at a purged infidel. "I do hope, though, that he doesn't encourage Dal in his waywardness—you know what I mean, dear Aunt Edmonia, of course?" she added hurriedly.

"I am sure Lucia that you may rely upon Randal—in all things," answered the oldest aunt a bit stiffly. The Smile had convinced *her* of anything Randal chose, after that. "Your brother's face shows what he is."

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"It does, doesn't it?" said the Secretary—who had been standing near—to Zona. "The face of a misanthrope, a man apart; yet not the face of an idler, a mere dilettante, I think Zona?" The sharp old eyes watched her in some suspense.

"No—o," she said slowly, almost wishing that she did not know why the face looked different to her from when she had last seen it. "No, Mr. Secretary, it seems to me rather the face of a weary worker. Don't you see what I mean—there is nothing he does not know, thoroughly, thoroughly; even the problem with which we had planned to tempt him back would have been to him only the proof of what he knew already, I suppose. Yet—it's odd—at one time he used to irritate me, to make me uncomfortable because he was so quietly observant and unapproachable; but now I—I seem to understand him better."

"Yes." The ferret-eyed diplomat gave her a penetrating glance. She was unusually pretty to-night, in the warm yellow gown that italicized, but delicately, the burnished hair and contrasting black eyebrows. "You are a very charming woman, my dear," he told her with a sort of blunt gentleness.

But he was not expecting the wave of colour that flamed up over her face. "Do—do you think I seem a woman, really?" she stammered eagerly. "I—of course I'm twenty-three, almost twenty-four, but—some one told me—not so long ago—that when I should get to be a woman, I—he thought, you see——"

"I should like to interview that some one," remarked the Secretary soberly (privately determining that he would interview him, and very soon). "I have a feeling that with you present, I should not have to wear myself out arguing. But come, we must tackle

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those presents, or I shall never get you all off to bed and "—grimly—" have my talk with Randal. Start them all into the dining-room, can't you, Zona? And Dal shall light the candles."

Every year since he was a baby, with blinking solemn eyes, Dal had lit the myriad torchlets of the Family Christmas tree. The Family felt an odd distinction through Dal, even though they did account him peculiar. To-night he insisted that Lilith should go round the great green tree with him, and "do half."

"She always does things just same's I do," he informed them seriously. And Randal Wayne, from his corner next to Zona, was more and more sure that the boy was right. With the same engrossed interest the two moved about the tree—the swaying slender woman in her pale jewelled gown, and the slim, negligently graceful child—raising their long tapers with the same careful deliberation, then stepping back to observe, with the same grave, concentrated pleasure.

"The two most fascinating children in the world," said Wayne to Zona, so that just herself could hear. "Don't you find them so?"

He, who was an analyst by reflex—who knew all things (especially women) thoroughly, thoroughly—spoke to her for the first time with something besides courtesy.

And Zona smiled back at him, and then at the two by the tree, with that first flickering tenderness that promises divine maternity. "The two most fascinating children—yes," she repeated softly. "We—Mr. Wayne, we must take care of them. These others" (she nodded toward the chattering groups of Family, toward John Armistead and Lucia Herrington) "do

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not understand. Will you—take care of them—with me?" She waited, frightened of her uncharacteristic insinuation.

Wayne stretched out his hand. "Yes," he said gently. And Zona, too, thought the Smile beautiful.

She went on to tell him of her meeting with the Secretary, of the work she was doing for the Department, of her and Lilith's plans to visit New Orleans and later go out West—all with the most natural friendliness, which when she thought about it afterwards, seemed almost humorous in its non-correlation with her former attitude.

"And you?" she asked him finally, while they were pretending vast absorption in their presents, "what have you been doing, this long year and a half? What are you planning to do in America?"

"I—have been getting acquainted with a present some one gave me," he answered, staring fixedly at the pile of gifts which had somehow miraculously been transferred to him. "And the acquaintance has brought me at last to America. Who knows what I shall do here?" he went on more lightly. "You have heard that odd little Moslem chant—'Allah and I alone know what is in my heart.' Sometimes, this last year and a half, I think that only Allah knows, which reminds me that your friend Winthrop has gone to Egypt—scarabs, I believe, are the motive."

"Ah!" Fleetingly Zona wondered how he had known that she had stopped writing to Winthrop; then, as fleetingly, she remembered that he knew everything. "And Eunice?" she questioned innocently.

"It was Violet. Married you know—to Jenks. Mrs. Soper says Eunice is to be given a summer in

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England; to renew an—er—old childhood attachment, or something of the sort."

Zona laughed—she had a nice laugh, girlish and full of charm. "Poor Mrs. Twinehurst! A brother in the Trading Company is an onerous relative—when one takes his daughters seriously. And Mrs. Levering, Mr. Wayne——? I was truly fond of her."

"She is quite the same," said Randal, remembering not without pity how she had looked when she got into the tender to leave his ship, "quite the same. I am fond of her too. She sent you a little trinket—a tea-caddy carved like a Chinaman—though she said rather fearfully that she knew you didn't like Chinamen."

"Oh, but I do like them—I do like them, now!" Half shamefacedly Zona looked up at him. "I—I think I understand the East better now," she finished desperately—for as yet she was very shy with him.

"The unspoken and invisible, the tasteless and intangible—yes, I think you do," his peering narrow gaze touched her barely for an instant. He wondered—not so inadvertently—where Maddox was.

"That—that was exactly the way Mrs. Soper defined it." Zona saw again the great mournful comprehending eyes, heard again the philosophy that recognized neither cleverness nor training. "She said one had only to sit still and let it soak in."

"She knows," was all Wayne said; but with a significance that made the old Orient-frightened Zona shiver. "Her husband went to England for a vacation," he added after a moment, "but she stayed—in the East."

"Yes," said Zona, under her breath.

The gray eyes watching her blinked their nearest approach to briskness. "If Jonas has found those

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trunks of mine, I will show you what she sent." One must not overburden her with subtleties just at first—Zona. "You see by your being here you have saved me all sorts of doing up and forwarding."

Jonas had found the trunks, and soon he and Wayne came down with their arms full—Jonas with all sorts of quaint packages wrapped in rice paper; Wayne with but a single object—though it was not large at all—a hideous, exquisitely carved bronze god. With a simple directness worthy of herself, he took it over to the corner where Lilith had her things; he had meant to give it to her alone, but he wanted her to have it now, when the others had their gifts—wanted to see her with it, her dearest toy.

When he had set it down beside her, he stood off and watched—the quickening breath, the faint tinge of colour, the deepening scarlet of the lovely curved mouth, the involuntary "Aih!" and the unconscious, instant falling to the knees—which he had known so well would come; which he had pictured to himself all this long year and a half, since *she* had made *him* a present, which had teased and nagged in spiteful insistent distinctness, until at last the image forced him back to this America, to seek its flesh and blood. Flesh and blood!—and long ago he had thought he had completed his weary emancipation from the physical; had become so thoroughly the spider, that it never had occurred to him how one day he might be knocked from out his web. Yet he was knocked out; the cleverly spun fabric of self-consciousness had fallen away from him—in the blinding light of a bare underground room—picked to pieces by the hands of a woman who did not understand ten words he said!

"But what I feel——" the suggestion came to him

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like that lightning flash of green, as he touched her fingers by apparent accident—and he still felt something; was feeling more all the time, since the woman of his re-creation had in turn presented him with a new self. Never would he be rid of that faintly smiling shadow that stood always at his elbow or looking over his shoulder in silent mockery of its deposition—that old self that knew its intricacies as a cat knows its claws—that gave him to understand quietly that it was merely biding its time. Never would he be rid of that. And yet—looking at the woman, Lilith, the sum of all his sensitiveness exulted; and he knew that he would never quite slip back into what he had been. No person can, who has stood in realization of an achievement of his which has developed greater than he; there is granted to him, even after the Trap has sprung, the sublime knowledge of having created bigger than his conception.

"Certainly was thoughtful o' you to bring that old idol along, Randy," Armistead broke in upon his speculation awkwardly. Armistead was reminded that in those last days of his exceeding irritation—primarily with Randy, but extending to every one in general—he had refused to bother with the "clumsy old piece o' junk." The recollection, all recollection of his rudeness that time of departure from the place of Wayne's unfaltering hospitality, embarrassed him most uncomfortably now; it was distinctly humiliating to meet the host he had berated, once more on the host's own ground, accepting lavishly again of the family generosity. "Daresay you think it's deuced queer, our being here," he added, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other. "But the Secretary——"

"It seems to me the most natural thing in the

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world—your being here," Wayne assured him, with that rare, winning courtesy which somehow placed the blunt financier in another planet. "It is the last word of completion, for my coming home." And again he looked at Lilith—absorbed absolutely with her recovered treasure—and his impassive face grew wholly beautiful in its contentment.

"Well"—Armistead was getting back that self-confidence that never deserted him for long—"I'm mighty glad you've come round to my way of thinking, Randy, old man; I always said to Lil that if once a person could get at you——"

"And at last you did," the other interrupted, half dreamily, "You—and Mrs. Armistead."

"Lil? Oh, Lil didn't have anything to do with it. I thought once she was downright put out with me, for keepin' at you like I did—Southern ideas of hospitality and all that—p'rhaps you have 'em yourself, and cursed me for an interferin' cad?" He looked up anxiously. "Come now, own up—didn't you?"

"No—I never cursed you," replied Wayne composedly. "I—I was always rather fond of you, Jack." With the statement his eyes seemed drawn almost hypnotically to that mass of red-gold hair.

Armistead reddened with pleasure. "Were you, sure enough?" he blurted out delightedly. "Then you don't hold it up against me for having made you come home?"

"No,"—the fine lips twitched, ever so slightly, "oh no; I don't hold it up against you." However he wondered mildly what Armistead imagined had been detaining him, during the year and a half, since the "making."

"And you're going in to be a real American—

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make a howlin' success o' yourself—that's bully! What'd you do with all your stuff—furniture, and that old yellow-face that waited on you all the time?" Armistead asked the question as ingenuously as it occurred to him. "Pack 'em all off, eh?"

"They're still there." It was hard for even Wayne to see them, past the blaze of a multitude of candles, and the grandeur of the aunts' state gowns—"I may—sometime—go back, you know."

"Now, see here——" Armistead was about to launch into an earnest exhortation, when Dal came up to say good-night.

"They're all going, pretty soon, Uncle says"—he told Wayne manfully—"and oh, Uncle Randy, that kite is most *beau-tiful*!" The way he said it was so like some one else, that Uncle Randy started imperceptibly—then drew the boy to him with an impulsiveness that greatly surprised John Armistead. "Do you s'pose, maybe, you could show me how to fly it—sometime?" The wistful eyes added "to-morrow?"

"To-morrow," promised Uncle Randy, as though to delay longer would be quite out of the question.

"And you'll show me just the way they do over there?" Dal persisted. "You'll show me how to do *everything* like they do in Hong-kong?"

Uncle Randy picked him up in his arms, as though he had been a baby—and though Dal was a grown-up boy, almost a man, he did not mind—and looked at him with an expression the old self never could have summoned. For a long moment he looked at him so; then without answering, he kissed him—almost sadly—and put him down.

But Dal knew that he would show him. Already he saw that Uncle Randy was just like Lilith, in

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being able to talk without saying anything; and Uncle Randy's kiss had been a promise—Dal felt vaguely—of a great many things, strange things, but oh so interesting!

He went up to bed, full of a joy that was almost too intense, even for his ardent unsatisfied young soul.

And very soon, as Uncle had said, they all took their candles from Jonas, and wound up through the ghostly hallways to their rooms—a laughing, chattering procession, unexpectedly happy and excited still, over the return of "dear old Randy," and his charming presents. Randal stood at the foot of the wide stairs and watched them; the contrast with that other procession he knew so well—that silent, swinging line of chairs, borne through the darkness like a caravan of fate's, with only the flat pad of brown bare feet to mark its progress—rounded his eyes to an increasing thoughtfulness. When Zona came, he took her candle from Jonas and gave it to her with a little smile that emphasized their new affiliation; she could understand to-night, could Zona, what Lilith had meant by that low, vibrant "God of my soul!—we were happy." She could understand; and she wondered with all the passion of her awakening womanhood, if one day she would know that happiness. Half enviously—to the everlasting shame of Universal Law and all the principles of social ethics—she looked back over her shoulder at her cousin; whose candle also Wayne was handing her. Unconsciously she listened, eager to hear what they would say.

But "Will you carry my god upstairs for me?" was all that Lilith asked him. "I should like to have it in my room, to-night—yes?"

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"Yes." What the Secretary thought a servant might easily have done, the man of many servants did as a matter of course. And the two tall slender forms disappeared down a shadowy corridor, with the exquisite, grinning god between them.

A man's face may conceal many things that his hands betray. Wayne's hands when he came back to the Secretary five minutes later, were thrust deep into his pockets. But there was a gleam in his eye, as of one who has held his lips to the brimming cup —for the ecstasy of an instant—and known the reason of life.

"Well?" said the Foreign Secretary shortly. In the vast spaces of the old hall uncle and nephew were quite alone.

"I trust it is—well?" Wayne returned, nonchalantly cordial.

"You understand me. Don't let's quibble," the older man sat down testily. "I want to know what it all means."

"Then you should never come to me." The other sat down also, with a grace whose total un-Occidentalism salted the wounds of the defeated. "I have never been able to say what anything means, in my life—("since I found out what everything means," he added to himself, the old self).

"At least you used not to require things explained to you," said the Secretary dryly. "Do you happen to know why you have come home?"

"Sometimes I think I do—and then again, I am not sure."

"And you think, sir"—the State Department's unheeded dignity was fast mounting in its wrath— "you think that you can calmly pick up and leave a post, a station of the United States Government, to

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which you have been appointed as representative, for reasons of which you are 'not sure'! It's disgraceful —I—it's unbelievable!" His angry old fingers tapped the mahogany chair-arm intolerantly. "And whom did you leave in charge—and to notify the Department —a secretary! A person who probably doesn't know a damned thing about the entire service!" For the moment he forgot what John Armistead had told him the secretary knew.

"Oh, yes, he knows a damned thing about it," assured the consul tranquilly. "He is quite a good secretary, you know. He seemed quite pleased to be left in charge."

"Hm! I suppose so. Thinks he'll succeed to the berth, probably. Well," by this time remembering Armistead's information, "we might do worse, I daresay. The main thing I want to know is, why, after all your obstinacy these ten years, you've come home. What did you think you'd get out of it?"

Randal Wayne stared. He had been away too long to have heard the popular American query—the keynote of present day action. "I came home because I could not help it," he answered simply. "I have already got what I wanted."

Something in his quiet definiteness made Nicholas Wayne suddenly afraid that he meant to go back, and soon. The diplomat cleared his throat, remembering Zona's warning as to frightening Randal off. "Now see here, Randy, we must talk this over." He pushed up his chair conciliatingly. "When you said goodbye to me, in this hall, ten years ago, you were in a pretty ticklish way; you'd left precious little to the imagination of Mobile, as to the intricacies of going to the devil; and the Family washed their hands of you—turned you over to me, to get rid of, and reform if I

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could—but above all, to get rid of. Well, I got you sent off to Tokio; thinking a few months of the service would sober you down, and teach you how to come home and behave yourself. Instead," the Secretary's lips tightened, "it taught you how to stay on out there, and—God knows what you did. Armistead says, nothing. Which is better than I might have expected, I suppose. Meanwhile I get into the Cabinet, and so have a chance to set about your promotion; which I do. And what is the result? You refuse—dally with my offers for weeks—and then refuse to take a better residence; making me look like a fool twenty times over, and distressing Lucia and the Family until they stopped speaking of you at all. Don't you see the position you've placed yourself in? The position you've placed me in as well?"

"They were very nice to me this evening," meditated Randal, lighting a cigarette without any great show of consternation; "they were really quite magnanimous, weren't they?"

Not a hint of irony clung to the innocent question. "They were glad to see you, of course," acknowledged the Secretary stiffly. "You are always a Wayne, no matter what you do. But that first cordiality won't last indefinitely; not unless you bolster it with some sincere effort to make up for the past. Now I'm ready to call bygones bygones, and put you at the head of that Bureau—what d'ye say?"

"That I couldn't think of imposing on you to that extent. Bygones are so apt to repeat themselves, you know, and then—one calls them quite something else."

"You're afraid I'll be throwing things up at you; but you know me better than that—or would have, if you'd ever cared to get to know me at all."

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"I am enjoying getting to know you now," said Randal truthfully. "No, I don't think you would throw things up at me"—he smiled appreciatively at Wrinkles, who still lay by the fire, blinking amusement at the whole situation—"old things, that is. The trouble would lie in there not being any new things; in an American office you might find me rather quaint, might you not?"

"If you mean you wouldn't do anything, I should certainly find you more than quaint," returned the American. "But you would do things; you'd do more than almost anybody in the country, if you happened to care to." Always the compelling force of the perfectly effortless spirit! "Don't you care to, Randy? Is your coming home just a whim—like your staying over there?"

There was something very pathetic in the Secretary's anxiety as he waited. Randal was the one failure of his sixty-nine years of achievement. And the narrowed gray eyes were sensitive to pathos, as to everything.

"You are very good, to care so much," the younger man said gently. It came incongruously to him to utter commonplaces; but those were among the other monotonies he had never been able to escape. "My coming home was not a whim, no. I could hardly make you understand why I came; I hardly understand myself. It is as I told Miss Raimund this evening, Allah alone knows."

"You told Zona, eh?" The Secretary hurried past anything that whiffed of the East. "So you and she had a talk—well?"

"She is getting over her education delightfully. It is too bad Maddox is as far away as Chicago."

"Maddox? Roger Maddox—was she interested

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in him?" In his zeal for his latest hobby, Zona, he forgot for a moment that constant obsession—to get hold of Randal.

"Not sufficiently. I should say more so now." Randal was puffing long slow breaths of his oddly fragrant tobacco.

"Um-m." The Secretary foresaw the detective work towards that interview considerably shortened. He looked at his nephew almost genially. "No reason in the world why you shouldn't get to be just as big a man as Maddox," he said, laying an impressive hand on Randal's arm.

"You think so?" That tranquil, unamused smile flickered once more across the fine-cut lips.

"Sure of it. You've just as much brains, and as much if not more—er—personality." The Secretary meant magnetism, but he did not know it. He did not know exactly what he did mean; so he hurried on. "If you'll take this Bureau, and push it, get it out of the rotten hole Cornish——"

"Ah—so it's in a hole?" the gray eyes contracted a shade narrower.

"Well, yes—that is, Cornish, the man I had to put in after waiting such a devil of a time for you, has bungled. Thought he understood the ropes and didn't, or some such milk-and-water reason—but the thing isn't queered, Randy—not by a long way. It can be made the greatest stroke of the Administration; the Party's down on it, but the President——"

"I see. And you want me to *make* it?" The new self and the old were exchanging reflections. Though it had got what it wanted—confirmation of the success of its achievement—the new self was not ready to retreat. The soul it had brought forth to life was very fascinating, tantalizingly full of promise. With an

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inward nod of agreement it heard the suggestion of the old self.

"It will be amusing to bewilder all this activity by a success greater than its own," said the old self. "How did Caro put it?—'for you have that with which no world can cope. You have only to sit in an office'——"

"You want me to *make* the Bureau?" he repeated aloud.

The Secretary drew a long breath. "Yes." It was a very different proposition, he found suddenly, from offering Randy to let bygones be bygones. The question of favour had whirled round as on a pinwheel. "Will—will you do it?—You can do it absolutely in your own way," he begged humbly, nevertheless; the man who could effect such a revolution was, he concluded, worthy of his humility.

"I will do it on one condition," replied Wayne slowly: "that you will keep the Hong-kong post open—that is, give it over to my secretary as *locum tenens* for six months, before filling the appointment."

"Oh!" Nicholas Wayne looked up disappointedly.

"You must do exactly as you like," said his nephew, as detachedly as though they were talking of Mr. Jenks.

That decided Nicholas. "I am quite willing to agree," he returned instantly—as the chance to get hold of the elusive Obstinacy seemed on the point of slipping through his fingers—"quite willing. I will wire the Department to-morrow—or day after to-morrow. To-morrow's Christmas, isn't it?" He looked up at the old grandfather clock—it pointed half-past twelve. "Merry Christmas—well, Randy, you've made it merrier than we expected. Good-night, boy"—there was something almost solemn in the way the

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white-haired elder man held out his hand. " When the festivities are over, and all these people gone, then we'll get down to business."

" Yes," said Randal, taking his candle that had burnt itself exactly half out, and regarding it curiously, " then we'll get down to business."

And Wrinkles, trotting leisurely after him up the stairs, looked back at the Secretary and winked—at the joke.

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CHAPTER V

THE aunts and under-uncles were all gone. The Christmas of so many people was over, and tomorrow would be New Year's Day. Dal thought about it, but vaguely, as he walked about the garden—or what in summer was the garden—with Uncle Randy. The cold sleet of the week before was gone too, like the bleak chill of the aunts' disapproval, and now everything was bright and sunshiny—almost balmy, as it can be in the South for sudden little parts of months supposedly the property of winter. It would be hard to go back to the city, to Washington, and be shut up in school again, with not even a grown-up in the house when one came home in the afternoon; certainly no one to fly kites, or whittle curious bamboo whistles, or to talk to one, about anything but "waywardness." Dal wrinkled up his nose—which was his way of making a face; only two-grown-ups he knew had never talked to him of waywardness!

He looked up at the one he walked beside, and his face grew very sober. "Are you going to be too busy, too—Uncle Randy?" he asked dejectedly.

"Too busy for what, Light of Heaven?" returned the musical lingering voice. And Dal sighed contentment. It was the nicest name he had ever heard of—Light of Heaven; far, far nicer than Dal Herrington; and Uncle Randy had assured him that

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Len, who had three sons, always called his favourite, the oldest, that. "I meant when we get back to Washington," Dal explained, watching Uncle Randy's legs so as to match steps. "Mother and Uncle, you know, are always too busy. Shall you be Society too, Uncle Randy?"

"God forbid!" said Uncle Randy, softly under his breath—like Uncle when he swore, yet sounding very solemn. "No, Little Great-One; at half-past four when you come home, you will find me always there—always there." Something in Uncle Randy's voice made Dal slip his hand quickly into his. "We will lie on the floor by the fire and tell stories, or go for long walks together through the dusk—was that what you meant?"

"Yes." Dal gave another long sigh; the nicest things one could think of were never as nice as those that seemed to occur to Uncle Randy by the merest chance. He glanced furtively at the beautiful serene face that was his God of To-morrow—would he ever get to be like it, *exactly*? Lilith said that he would. And Dal hoped, with a fervour whose expression was already rendering his mother plaintively uneasy.

"Mother says I can't go back with you all," he told Randal disappointedly. "She says there'd be three whole days of me about the house, and no school. You understand me, I'm sure, don't you?" The languid, self-satisfied voice was drolly well done.

"Ah—yes." Uncle Randy found occasion to cover his mouth for an instant. "But aren't you rather—er—unaccustomed"—Uncle Randy would never have said young—"to be travelling alone? Don't you mind taking that long journey by yourself?"

"Oh, no," said his nephew composedly; "I've often done it before, you see. Jonas goes with me on

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the train, but I buy all the tickets and attend to the baggage and things. I've made quite long trips by myself."

"And you liked that?"

"Yes. Uncle Randy, I would like to go all the way to Hong-kong. Would you—will you take Lilith and me?" Since Uncle Randy's coming, he had continued to ask for her as for himself; had he not seen that she looked up to Uncle Randy and reverenced him, as he—Dal—did? "Will you take us?" he repeated earnestly.

The hand that was holding his hurt it with its sudden tightening; but Dal did not wince. He waited; his hazel eyes drawn up to mere slits, in their desire.

But Uncle Randy never answered, for just then Zona appeared at an upper window with a sweater. "You must take care of him," she reminded gaily, throwing it down.

And Uncle Randy nodded gravely, and helped Dan into the sweater which he detested, but which some one was always throwing him, because he had a cold. Then, just as he was about, timidly, to repeat his great request, Uncle came up and carried Uncle Randy off to the study, where every day they spent long hours shut up together, over some dull business.

After several disconsolate rounds of the garden by himself, he decided that he would go up to Lilith's room and play consul; there were plenty of wide soft couches and long inviting chairs in Lilith's room, also a luxurious wadded coat—all the necessities for playing consul accurately. Lilith was out, with mother, but she would not mind. Dal opened the door gently, and went into the quiet empty room with the assurance of one who had been often welcomed. But—the minute he got inside—he felt that the room was not empty;

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something, some presence, seemed to come to meet him, to take possession of him with silent irrevocable determination. It frightened him at first; then by its placid, unaggressive tenacity, stilled him into acquiescence; and after a little into pleasure. He looked about him fearfully. What could it be? Then he knew.

It was the curious grinning smile of the god Uncle Randy had brought Lilith; a smile that seemed to beckon, beckon to him, with mysteriously friendly promise. Dal shivered. Then he walked up to the god and gazed at it fascinatedly. When Lilith came home he was still there, cross-legged on the floor before it.

"He loves it too, my ugly god," Lilith told Wayne as they sat together after luncheon in the vast sun-lit hall; "he sees too how very beautiful it is."

"Yes"—Wayne looked about for the boy, who, directly after the meal, had disappeared—"I begin to think he does. I brought it back to both of you, it seems." And a slight shadow darkened the line of gray which formed his eyes.

With the unfailing instinct of a race of women willingly subordinate, she saw that he was not so contented as he had been the moment before; and it was her entire *raison d'être* to keep him satisfied—to substitute instantly for the happiness that had slipped from him. "I shall get you a cigarette," she said in a voice that was like cool, hypnotizing fingers on the brow; "and then you will take the *siesta*, no?"

The others—Zona and the Secretary and Lucia—had gone to town on some vague shopping expedition; John Armistead was, naturally, away—in Atlanta. He would not return until that night. So that, as once the high white veranda, now the great stately hall

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belonged absolutely to the two who were complete together—who apart were strange exaggerations. He who had worn the wheels of knowledge thin, down to a powder that he could pile up or blow away at will, glanced at her whose knowledge rose and concentrated in her finger-tips; and at the mystery of what he felt for her, sighed—moved closer to her, where she sat on a low footstool at his knees, and accepted the cigarette, full of the consciousness that it was much more. His shutting eyes took in with an almost sublime comprehension that unmistakable spirituality that shone through her mere physical beauty like a fine torch of suggestion—of what she had lived since the day when he first saw her, since the day even when he had seen her last. A year and a half of renunciation is the most enhancing spiritual force that can work mortal flesh into immortal perfection.

Facing the result of his experiment, Wayne knew that he would never have gone back and omitted it had the chance offered, and that—in the light of what the experiment had entailed for him—was saying the heroic.

"What I would like to tell you frames itself into triviality," he said to her in a low monotone. "You are the woman I imagined might be possible—whom I have made possible; and you are still unconscious. It is worth a great deal." He closed his eyes altogether this time, and lay very still.

With a smile on her lips that would have made any man catch his breath, the woman sat there at his feet and watched him. Unused to lift a finger for herself, she took up a fan from the cushions of the ingle-nook, and swayed it slowly back and forth above the serene immobile face—with a supple swing of the wrist that pointed many generations of servitude. There seemed to stand behind her a long line of women, wielding fans,

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in patient unexpectant attention; and their repose was her repose—perfect, but somehow suggesting the alertness of a watchful tigress whose very quiet is itself a menace. Only the fan stirred her stillness; but one felt behind the fan a pair of brooding jade-green eyes, fastened in clinging slavery to the motionless form they guarded. While beneath the eyes themselves there dwelt a passion such as is the cumulation only of centuries—such as is too all-encompassing to realize itself, until it breaks—in some volcano of expression.

The sun was making spindly, gnome-shaped shadows over the huge hall, and its glow came crimson through the lancets, when at last the man on the cushions opened his eyes. "And you are still here with me," he murmured, immeasurably content; "but soon—the day after to-morrow—you will have gone; I shall have gone. It will all be as before." Even as he said it, he knew that it was a lie. Neither he nor the woman was as he or she had been; there was that new, steady light behind her eyes—blinding almost, unwavering; while he—was in America. It would never be the same.

"If you want me I will come with you," she said simply.

"If I want you——!" The look in his face made her own pale with response. What he felt, she understood quite well. "You are the only thing I have ever wanted in my life," he finished quietly. And it was true.

The tenets of women gone mad over a passing jealousy, of men become murderers for the sake of a slipper, shone in the leaping gleam of the long green eyes.

"You would leave all this?" His glance swept the luxury which, since she had been Armistead's, had

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always surrounded her. "You would go out with me, directly, with no more forethought or hesitation?" His gaze bent upon her, roundly fascinated by the primitiveness of it.

"But certainly!" A storm seemed to rise in her, with his doubt. "God of my life! Do you not *understand?* I would go out with you now—at this instant, yes!—and I should leave nothing, nothing!" The tempest died as quickly as it came. "One day I shall go out to you," she added slowly—as she had spoken that night to Zona on the stairs. "I have seen it often in my dreams; and my mother said only dreams are really true. I shall go out to you, *si*; but I shall never reach you. None of the Tangueys do. They are always thrust aside in their happiness, like poor madre. But I shall go out to you, *si*." She said it over with a monotonous, sweet positiveness, as though it comforted her.

The confident, almost visionary look of her stirred Wayne's pulses to a sense of premonition. "If you do not reach me, I shall come to meet you"—the words came mechanically, spoken through him rather than by himself—"I shall never fail you—Lilith!"

As she turned to him the look of her pushed the old self for once too far away to eavesdrop; too far away even to get a glimpse of what it had never known. It was the new self that triumphed absolutely, there in that place of quiet and of lengthening shadows, where the two souls that had roused each other into life, met—full of rarer recognition than on that morning when first they realized themselves; the new self that gloried in the wonder of this brief reunion, after a long year of only memory. It was the one moment that, if he could, Wayne could have laid hold of and detained—to live eternally in its perfection.

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But after a while a child stood before them, silent, and very, very wistful. These two people whom he loved better than anything in the world—and who had been the first to love him—were oblivious of him; given wholly to each other. In the recess of the splendid gold-splashed window, they were motionless, scarcely breathing, though their eyes clung with a steadfastness that was all breath in itself. Would they never turn round? Or with them too—now that they loved each other—was he to be in the way—you know what I mean, of course, a nuisance? The young lips trembled; but he bit them bravely. He had been divinely happy while the brief dream of joy—the joy of being cared about—had lasted; if now it was over——

"Would—would you rather I went away?" he asked quiveringly, unable to bear the suspense a moment longer.

And then it was that the truly divine happened; that without saying a word they drew him into their arms between them, and he knew that the dream was to go on.

When John Armistead came home, at twilight, he found the three there in the ingle-nook—the two tall slender figures, with the slighter child's figure between them—and the throat of the childless man contracted queerly.

"D'ye—don't ye wish we had him, Lil?" he sank down into the place Wayne had vacated, and began patting the boy with clumsy wistful affection.

"I have him!" Lilith answered instantly. "He is mine—all mine—are you not, my most wonderful?"

"Yes," said Dal blissfully, "yours an' Uncle Randy's. But"—the heart that had been lonely for so long went out to the loneliness beside him—"couldn't

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I be Mr. Jack's too ? " he pleaded. He liked Mr. Jack —he was so jolly and kind, and never failed to bring back a marvellous present for Dal when he went to town. " Couldn't I be yours an' Uncle Randy's an' Mr. Jack's too ? " he persisted, smoothing Mr. Jack's rough square hand.

Lilith stood there, between the two child-like faces that besought her ; looking from one to the other like a trapped thing, until finally the gleam in her eyes broke into a swift, unchecked fury. " No ! " she exclaimed, in a low, wholly Spanish voice that John Armistead had never heard before. " No—aih ! You are tearing my heart out ! " And shaking off the childish hand that was trying to bind her to that other, she swept passionately away from them, and upstairs.

Dal looked at Mr. Jack, bewildered. " I 'spect she can't feel well," he said dubiously, all at once very much depressed.

" I expect not, son." Mr. Jack got up with a sigh. He had had a long hard day over the biggest deal of his whole business life—a deal which he had not been able to consummate ; and Lil, in spite of all his efforts to please her with new gew-gaws, grew more and more peculiar. He started heavily upstairs.

" But Mr. Jack "—a pitiful young voice came in his ear—" I like you. And—and you can have me—part of the time—if you want."

And with that Mr. Jack turned and nearly wrenched Dal's hand off—and then blew his nose with a tremendous blast, as he hurried on.

How odd grown-ups were—Dal leaned pensively against the bannisters, with a sub-conscious view to sliding down ; but Jonas was looking at him searchingly from across the hall where he was lighting the candles and Dal had to abandon the idea, and walk down

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stiffly. He would be glad when he was rid of Jonas, he reflected, as nearly irritated as he ever got; with Len, and the boy with the red-buttoned cap, he would be able to do just as he pleased. All consuls did that, he was sure.

"It isn't at all ne'ss'ry for you to look at me like that, Jonas," he said severely, walking up to the old darkey with an impressive combination of his mother's most lethargic manner, and Uncle Randy's negligent seriousness. "I know you're old and have the chilblains somethin' scan'lous, but you ought to have more tact, Jonas. You've been in the Family 'most a thousand years."

At which indisputable logic, Jonas only rolled his eyes till they seemed to disappear up inside his head, and muttered to himself—after an annoying habit he had. "Jes' 's like's two pins—like's de trees am in de night—an' bof of 'em plum crazy 'bout Miss Lith. Don' I know? Ain' I nursed 'im when he wuz a lil' blinkin' baby? Shoh! I tell yuh, chile, ol' Jonas him know—him know all dey is goin' 'bout Massa Ran'al."

"What's that you're mumbling, Jonas?" asked Dal, still severely. "If you have anything to say about Uncle Randy—anything worth saying—you might speak it out loud. If you had anything to say about Uncle Randy, I might listen to you."

But the old negro shook his head slowly. "No, baby, no—I ain' got nuthin' to say. But I knows jes' same—I knows. I ain' seen ma ol' granpappy's ghost a-walkin' in de cotton patch five nights runnin', an' not know whut's upon us. C'lamity 'n d'struction, baby!—c'lamity 'n d'struction!"

Dal walked away from the nodding old servant in lofty disgust. Jonas was always seeing his grandpappy's ghost somewhere; and if there was one thing

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that made him—Dal—more "wayward" than any other, it was being called "baby!"

"He doesn't realize though," he told Zona when she came in, with forbearing sagacity. "He's so old—more'n a thousand years old—he doesn't know what he says, or why, Zona."

But Zona, to whom Dal had repeated the old man's fussy mutterings—as much as he had heard of them—looked rather troubled. "Calamity and destruction"—she started up abruptly. "Come on, Dal, let's play ball out on the veranda. I—I feel as though I wanted air." And though it was quite dark, and almost dinner-time, she bundled him into his sweater, and outdoors.

Truly, grown-ups *were* funny!

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CHAPTER VI

"WELL, Zona." The Secretary smiled at her with all his usual affection; and something more—a little air of excitement, of anticipation, seemed to surround him this New Year's morning. "Our work's done, eh? We've got Randy back in America, and starting at the Bureau. And there's a lot of thanks due to you, I can tell you! I don't know what I should have done without you, my dear—an old fellow's temper's such a handicap to him in these manœuvres that call for finesse. But you went about everything so smoothly, and kept me in hand till it's all come out right. I only wish—ahem!—that I could even things up a bit by accomplishing some desire of yours for you."

Zona slipped her hand through his arm, and walked along with him, up and down the great length of the old hall. 'You've accomplished a very big thing for me," she said, smoothing his coat sleeve with a deprecating lightness. "You've given me something to do, something to try my ability, if I have any; and then you have given me my first successful achievement to look back upon; I am sure that's quite reward enough!"

"Well, well, we shall see; we shall see." The Secretary was smiling to himself under his moustache. "I—but no matter now. Zona"—his face grew

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serious again—" another thing that has occurred to me. You see, you go away to-morrow, child, and your old friend has been thinking over all these matters that concern you—a thing "—he hesitated—" that I have never spoken to you about."

" Yes, Mr. Secretary ? " Zona looked up at him trustfully.

" You are going off down there to New Orleans," he began slowly, " to be alone with your cousin—oh, I dare say Armistead will look in on you once in a while, especially after he gets this business matter that's worrying him settled up—but for the most part, and for several months probably, you will be the only one with her."

The fact suddenly impressed itself upon Zona ; in thinking of going with Lilith down to the old house of their mothers, it had not come to her (at least not with any special significance) that she would be *alone* with her cousin. The idea seemed at once to fix a certain responsibility. She remembered her uneasiness when in Hong-kong she had been alone with her —alone with her and the consul, rather. But Mr. Wayne would not be there—in New Orleans—she comforted herself ; and even if by chance sometime he should be, had he not promised her to help take care of Lilith ? Was he not now on her side, to assist ?

" I don't think I shall mind being alone with her, Mr. Secretary," Zona decided. " Why did you think of that ? "

" When Armistead first came "—the diplomat drew his heavy brows together frowningly—" when I had seen the two of them together (or rather not together, he added to himself) for a day or so, I took it upon myself to mind Armistead's business for him ; as

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long as he was letting the most important business in his life go to the wall. I told him a story—it was a story about a man whose wife had wearied of being merely paid for and kept in luxury, whose heart and soul had demands as well as her body. I told him how this man had not considered that, and how after his wife's death he realized—that some one else had considered it. I said—I remember very clearly—'You will forgive me, Armistead, but both women being so beautiful, the one recalled the story of the other.'"

"And he?" Zona looked up absorbedly.

"He said 'She *is* a beauty, isn't she?'—or something like that."

"Ah! Yes, I suppose he would say that."

They paced up and down for some moments in silence, each of their imaginations pondering over that of the man who had none.

"And lately"—through the window the Secretary had caught sight of two tall slender figures walking in the garden—"it has seemed to me that this woman's heart and soul were being satisfied; her beauty, Zona, is of a very different sort from when she arrived at this house."

Zona's small face raised itself almost tremulously. "It must be something very wonderful that can change one like that," she pleaded, with a wistfulness not lost upon her sharp-eyed friend.

"It is the most wonderful thing in the world—and the most dangerous. That is why I speak of it to you; there is bound to come a crux in things. And then—unless I am very much mistaken—she will turn to you. You are the one woman of her family left; you and she will be there alone together, for this thing cannot go on for ever, you know, Zona, and

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with people of the South climaxes come quickly. As I say, sooner or later there will come a crisis; she will turn to you for counsel, and a great deal—perhaps everything—will depend on what you answer her. I don't want to frighten you, my dear"—he patted the hand on his arm kindly—"but I know you have common sense; and these affairs come upon us often so unexpectedly—so swiftly and crushingly." The white-haired widower sighed; his step for a moment was a little slower.

"But I know you'll pull through it all right, child," he straightened up briskly. "You have brains and you know how to use 'em; and better than that, you have cleverness and heart. They'll bring you out of any responsibility with flying colours."

"It is an atmosphere in which cleverness goes for nothing!" Ah, but that was Hong-kong; and now she had added to herself heart. She was a woman. Nevertheless Zona felt troubled; she wished the Secretary had not said that perhaps everything would depend on her—if he had not put it just that way.

"And you can count on me to do my best at my end of the line," he was concluding steadily. "But even if I had more influence there's very little that I can do; these things always rest with the woman, in the end."

"If only Cousin John—where is he this morning, by the way?" she broke off as again the two tall forms came in sight of the window. "Why isn't he here, this last day?"

"He went to town to meet some man, I believe," the Secretary spoke with a wonderful carelessness, "some politician; he'll be along. H'm—think I hear the carriage now. Zona, my dear, just take him

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—er—the person, you know—into my study. I must speak to Lucia a moment—I—yes, just a moment." He hurried off with a flurry of excitement.

Zona stared after him. What could be the matter? The head of the Wayne family stuttering like a delighted schoolboy who is yet a little bit nervous; and then "the person!" It was all so cryptic. Her own mind full of the conversation they had just had, she went to the big hall door to open it for Armistead. Perhaps when she had got the person out of the way, in the Secretary's study, she could manage a talk with Armistead; it might do no good, but then again —she drew the door back slowly.

And—"It is a very nice New Year," decided Roger Maddox, as he stepped in.

Zona fell back limply against the wall. "Where—where is Cousin John?" she stammered.

"Stopped in town for lunch. Coming out later; sent me on ahead, so as to get the full benefit of my welcome—yes," Mr. Maddox repeated, gazing pensively at the rug he was standing on, "that was what he said—my welcome."

Zona laughed. "If you will come in and take off your things," she said demurely, closing the door, "I will see what I can do for you. You see"—as they went on into the Secretary's study—"you are rather a surprise. The Secretary mentioned you only as a person." She took a chair as though she was glad to get to one.

"I'm not ashamed of it," Roger maintained, his eyes busy with the new things in her face; "besides, I trust his analysis. He wrote me that one found you wholly charming—a complete woman." At the same time Roger was glad her hair still curled stubbornly about her ears, that the eyes were still tawny,

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though full of a softer, more gracious light. He sat down opposite her, contentedly.

"How did he happen to write to you about me?" asked Zona, inwardly berating herself for the flood of colour that intruded upon her cheeks. "I never spoke of him to you."

"I'm surprised at you," Mr. Maddox told her seriously; "what on earth did you find to talk about?"

Zona sighed happily. "You are just as impudent as ever," she said, forgetting to wonder why the Secretary did not come back; "and now you're getting yourself elected to something, aren't you?"

"With Armistead's help." The blue fire of his eyes warmed enthusiastically. "That's what brought me South at this time—to see him before he got started on his Texas trip; poor old chap!—he's frightfully worried about that opposition combine that's started against him in the oil field down there. I wish to goodness I could do something; he's been the best sort of friend to me. But let me see"—the blue eyes pushed every one but herself into the background—"a year and a half has harassed us with separation, since last I saw you; and now (he spoke very gently) you are a complete woman. It cannot have been without pain, this process you have gone through? There has been suffering, wretchedness perhaps, in it—Zona?"

She drew her breath in sharply. "Yes." Her lips trembled, for there had never been any one to whom she could talk about it; she had had to go through the agony of readjustment alone, and quite in silence. "For a while I realized only that I was a failure," she said simply; "you understand—you have known that feeling?"

"I have known it, yes"—the old shadow crossed

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his face—" it is the drab that makes all life's colour murky. But now "—eagerly he came over and took the chair beside her—" you see the scarlet gleam again? And it gleams brighter—you find more joy in beholding it?"

" Ah, yes!" Zona's face lit up with much more than the old enthusiasm. " I—I find more joy in everything," she finished, locking her small hands together earnestly. " I suppose it is because—tritely speaking—I have found myself."

" But I showed you where to look!" he reminded with an arrogant joyousness. " You can't deny it—I pointed you down from your heights of intelligence into the undercurrent of your emotions, and so at last to the level place—self-realization. I really think "—he regarded her innocently—" you ought to share the find with me."

" I!"—Zona's speech stuck in her throat.

" It's only fair," he argued, overlooking her confusion; " and besides—don't you want to?"

" Mr. Maddox, I—I must tell you something: I never was engaged to Wyldon Winthrop. I——"

" Of course you weren't," responded Mr. Maddox cheerfully; " you couldn't possibly have been engaged to anybody. I'm not at all sure that I shall let you be engaged to me. Very artificial notion in the first place, engagements. But marriage—ah! *there's* a sensible idea for you! Why not improve it? You remember I used to say to you——"

" You said ' marry—when the time comes that you can't help it!' " The words she had thought of so often rolled from Zona's lips with a suggestive glibness.

" And have you been happy—helping it?"

" No "—with all her old frankness Zona leaned forward—" I have never been really happy, I suppose,

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in all my life. There has always been something——"

"But not some one!—that is the trouble. Think how easily you can remedy it now"—the blue fire disconcerted her out of all self-possession—"for you know, Zona—I have waited a long time to tell you so—you love me!"

Something within Zona rose up with a superb dignity; the elemental something that she shared with all the Tanguey women. Her arms dropped to her sides, her head was thrown back, she rose—exultant. "Yes, I do," she acknowledged without parrying; and as her eyes closed under his, she could repeat after Lilith at last: "God of my soul—we were happy!"

"And you'll marry me at once?" Roger asked, when he had convinced her of a number of things—among them that life was a riotously good thing, and that thanks to the Secretary's having given him a loophole of invitation, he had been able to plead business with Armistead and so prove the fact to her. "You'll come back with me now—at once?"

The light leapt up in her eyes; then she thought of Lilith. "Soon, Roger—but not at once," she said slowly. "As long as Lilith needs me—and she is going to need me very much after we leave here—I must stay with her. Once, you know, I failed her—I did not understand; now that I do, I must make it up. She—we are the only ones left to each other, you know, and—you heard that he has come back to America, that he is here—Mr. Wayne?"

"Yes, I heard." The blue fire was quenched of half its ardour. "But you won't let it be long?" he pleaded; "just until the New Orleans visit is accomplished? Surely when the Armisteads go back out West——"

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"When they go back out West"—the colour came and went in Zona's face—"I will go with them as far as Chicago! It—it will be a long time to me too, Roger"—her voice trembled a little; "it has been a long time already. But there's Lilith; and the Secretary says——"

What he had said she never finished; for just then the Secretary himself appeared in the study door, his eyes twinkling like those of a small boy appropriating forbidden fruit. "Well, my dear? Well, Maddox?" Still he stood smiling at them from the door.

"Mr. Secretary!" With a rush Maddox went to meet him; nearly wrung his hand off. "Some time—when I get to Congress"—he smiled impudently, but delightfully the Secretary thought—"I'll make you glad there's a State Department, and that you're it; I'll make you glad you're living; I'll make you—anything you like!"

"Is that what I've made you?" beamed the Secretary.

"You've made me everything I like, since you've made all I like possible for me."

"And Zona?" The Secretary stretched out his other hand and took his girl's. "You forgive the old schemer, my child?"

Zona reached up her arms and kissed him; her radiant eyes brimful. "I think you're rather a dear!" she said softly. "You've evened things up till they're all uneven again, for there's nothing we can do to pay you back for this! A Bureau is a mere bagatelle, in comparison."

"I suppose so." The sharp old eyes grew tender as they rested on her transformed face. "Yes; I remember. I hope, my dears, that everything—always—will seem but a bagatelle in comparison.

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For that is the way it was meant to be." And he left them to their New Year, and went to walk alone down the path where he had walked with Armistead, and told him the story.

* * * * *

To the Secretary Armistead was not the least pathetic figure next day when they all came to part; the older man of affairs could remember so well his own blindly worried absorption in what he too had called "the biggest deal of his life." It was with a twinge of more than compassion that he listened to Armistead hoping "to get everything he wanted, in the end."

"But it'll take two or three months," added the magnate ruefully, "and I'll have to be runnin' back and forth between Texas and Atlanta most of the time. Only decent thing about it is that I can look in on the girls pretty often. Reckon you wouldn't mind that job either?" He grinned at Maddox. They were all at luncheon together, for the last time; and Maddox, who had been persuaded to remain, was leaving for the North with the Wayne contingent, at almost the exact hour that the Armisteads were going South.

"Looking in is so unsatisfactory," objected Roger, regarding Zona plaintively across the table. "I want a job that's more permanent. Don't you think"—he turned to Lilith with ingratiating deference—"that you could help me get it—hurry it up a bit, I mean? Waiting's so tediously unnecessary."

"It is tedious, yes; and unnecessary—ah, I think so!" Though she smiled back at him very sweetly, Lilith's voice was singularly heavy—oppressed by something. "But one does not always wait," she finished tranquilly; "after a time—is it not so?—

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one rebels. My mother used to say that then—when a man or woman rose up, and refused to bear any longer the thing that had been crushing them, they were like fate; no one could thwart them. It is so, I think?" She looked up questioningly.

"Except that they thwart themselves," suggested Zona quietly, though two spots of colour flamed like danger signals in her cheeks. "A person who becomes his own god must punish after the manner of a god, as well as bless. Oneself as fate would be no kinder than any other—am I right, Mr. Secretary?"

"To me you are," said the Secretary slowly, while his eyes met those of his nephew and his grand-nephew, fixed upon him with the same narrow steadiness; "to me there has always been a sublime dignity in waiting," he added. "To deny oneself responsibility seems much greater than to let oneself assume it."

"Oh—la! la!" Lucia raised her pretty languid hands in mock despair. "Do, dear uncle—and you, sober young engaged person—let's dispense with metaphysics this last luncheon; don't you think I'm right, Mr. Armistead? It makes things so doleful, and they're doleful enough already, goodness knows. What with all of us going such various ways, and Dal moping over being left behind for three days—you see what I mean, don't you? And after all, Mr. Maddox asked such a simple little question to start all this; and Mrs. Armistead was so sweet and comforting. I do hate to think of your going off down there to that swampy old New Orleans," she protested, looking at Lilith with an air of personal injury. "You ought to be always in the midst of light and luxury and lovely slumbrous things. You know what I mean, don't you, Zona? Why not give it all up, and come with me to Washington for the two months?

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It would suit Mr. Armistead and—everybody, much better!" Lucia was leaning forward with an eagerness phenomenal for her; in her mind's magnifier she could see herself introducing the beautiful Mrs. Armistead as the sensation of the season. "It would suit everybody," she repeated insistently.

The rose that had rushed to Lilith's face was receding, leaving her whiter than before it came; the grave gray eyes she had instantly besought—whose every flicker she knew to a flicker's shade—sent her an answer that she understood, that she accepted implicitly. "It is that I cannot," she told Lucia; the Spanish simplicity of statement never forsaking her at moments when she was feeling more deeply than usual. "You are heavenly kind in asking, but I cannot. You see, we are going to my grandfather's house, that Jack"—she glanced at her husband with an untranslatable look (it might have been gratitude, or it might have been a faintly contemptuous pity)—"has taken so much trouble to get back for us. We shall be there together, Zona and I—alone in the house where our mothers used to live—and I think we shall be happy; no, Zocita?"

For a second Zona forgot Roger, and the dependence he had made her feel even in these short twenty-four hours. However, it was in the fullness of her new happiness, and the light which it threw on Lilith's pitifully heroic answer, that she turned to her cousin with an expression almost of divinity; it was so yearning, so all-comprehending. "Yes, dear," her voice made it a promise; "we shall be happy; I am sure of it; we shall be happy."

"And I do not need luxury and lovely things—now," Lilith went on half to herself. The gray eyes always watching her exulted. "Anything that is of

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New Orleans, that is in the old house of our mothers, I shall love—anything."

"Then I can't tempt you," Lucia sighed disappointedly. "Not even with my bad small boy?" she added laughingly. "He's really far more your child than mine, as it is."

The small boy's hazel eyes looked wistfully, wistfully into the green lovely ones of the only grown-up he had treated as himself, whom long ago he had forgotten to consider a grown-up at all. "If you'll come I'll show you all the best places to find icicles," he offered eagerly; "you lick 'em, you know, when you come home from school, and they're delicious!"

His mother and uncle laughed. When they were not displeased with him, they always laughed; but the one whom he regarded as himself did not laugh. She looked across at him with lips whose trembling kiss he seemed to feel, as he had felt it wonderingly many times. "My most generous one!—if I could!—but—you will show the icicles to Uncle Randy, no? And when I come North again—or perhaps you will lend him to me for some holiday?" she entreated Lucia. "You will let me have him when you go away sometime?"

Lucia laughed. "But, my dear, of course!" she returned lightly. "I shall be only too delighted; sometimes you know he is—rather a problem." The interrogatory glance she sent her uncle added—"You agree with me, I know, don't you?"

And the Secretary nodded over his fruit. "Rather a problem," he agreed soberly.

"Then I shall file him away in the Bureau," from his place beside Dal, Uncle Randy smiled upon him reassuringly. "And if then I can't solve him," he turned to Lilith, "I shall send him to you, to play

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with. So to the end, is this difficult person disposed of." By his lingering musical laugh Uncle Randy told Dal what a ridiculously absurd joke it all was, that he should be considered difficult; and as they left the table—the others to get their wraps and travelling bags—he drew Dal with him into their favourite corner of the ingle-nook.

"It's only for three days," reminded Uncle Randy, smoothing the small brown hand he held in both of his, "only three days, old man, till you'll be coming along, and then, very soon perhaps, you will be going to visit her—to visit Lilith."

"Ye-es." Dal looked at her where she stood talking to mother and putting on her hat. "I—I can't get used to it, Uncle Randy." His troubled hazel eyes filled, to his great shame. "She's been here with me all the time—we've had such a *beau*-tiful time together—and now she's going away; she won't be here any more. I can't get used to it." And though Uncle Randy had called him "old man," Dal had to drop his hand and go and stare very hard out of the window, winking his troublesome eyes manfully, but in vain.

"Why do you shed tears, my adored one?" A passionately tender arm swept round his shoulders. "Why are you so unhappy? It must not be—it shall not be! You were made for nothing but joy, nothing but happiness and love." In the seclusion of the ingle-nook, the lovely slender form knelt down beside him. "Listen, *carissimo*. I am going away, your Lilith to whom you are so beloved; and if you cry you will make me still more sad. You will make me truly wretched—so! You will not; you will look up and comfort me a little, no? And I will write to you almost every day, so that soon—soon—we shall

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arrange for you to come and stay with me. My most wonderful!" as he raised his tear-stained, bravely smiling face. "My little child!" And her hands embraced the small round head, and her own lips shook as they went down to touch his soft hair.

The man by the ingle-fire stood and looked at them, out of his narrowed all-perceiving eyes; but as he watched, for once the slits of gray caught fire, and almost roughly—for him—he went and joined them.

The carriages were at the door; Jonas had brought down the luggage and was piling it on the top of the van. Zona, Armistead, and Maddox were already out and getting in their cab. "Come on, Lil," called Armistead; "our train leaves first, y' know; hurry up."

"Yes, Randy, and our carriage is going to follow right behind theirs," Lucia added. "Never mind Dal, he'll get over it soon—Jonas will take care of Dal."

The two who were there in the far corner of the hall, with the child, looked at each other mutely, looked at him. And as he threw his arms round both of them they were complete; though the moment was infinitesimal, it was immortal.

"I will never fail you," said the man unsteadily, his voice so low that only she could hear. "It is not as it was before—in the temple. Each of us is more than then. I will never fail you—Lilith! I am really going with you."

"Yes"—she stood up tall, triumphant—"you are going with me, because you *are* me; the child is me, and you are me. We are all one together—and so we can never be separated—never—never!" Ecstatically she kissed the child one more, and then—like a queen—moved out and let Wayne put her in the carriage with Armistead.

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"They're gone, Jonas!" Dal looked after the departing carriages miserably. "They're gone—Lilith and Uncle Randy; and Uncle Randy looked all white and dreadful. Oh, Jonas—what is it? Why do we all feel so bad, this way? What's it all about, Jonas?" In his wretchedness over the mystery he felt but could not understand, he forgot his usual scorn of Jonas' mumbling answers. "What's it all about?" he repeated, gazing down the drive with a sort of dread.

The old negro shook his head. He too was gazing after the disappearing carriages. "C'lamity 'n d'struction, chile," he muttered awesomely; "dat's what it means; c'lamity 'n d'struction!" And he almost shoved the child back into the house, and shut him within it.

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CHAPTER VII

SOME six weeks after the formal opening of the Washington season, Mary—in a moment of exceptional boredom—wrote to Zona. After several large pink sheets of apology for her (by Zona wholly unnoticed) " long silence," and several more of very scrawly congratulations on dear Zona's engagement, *at last*—" That Mr. Wayne of yours," she went on, " is the most *elusive* creature (Mary always called people ' yours ' if they didn't happen to do what she wanted) Twice I have offered to give him a whole dinner to himself—you know, let him make out the lists and all that—and once I had ordered a new frock on purpose, that *weird* Chinese orange shade, with dragons and chrysanthemums and things embroidered down the front in panels, and the sleeves caught up with sphinx heads and coiled serpents—simply too Oriental for anything, and—where was I ? Oh, yes !—well, after I did all that preparation, and had nearly decided on monkeys and pagodas for the favours—in *candy*, of course you understand, dear—and had talked him up, Mr. Wayne, I mean, especially to that horrid Countess Catsfeldt, who thinks she has the most *bizarre* dinners in Washington, and a corner on all the *weird* people—after all I had gone through, do you know, that wretched man never came near, not even to *call* ! His assistant wrote a note—the most formal

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kind of note—saying that Mr. Wayne was obliged to refuse all invitations owing to press of work; now, you know, my dear, in Washington, where the men just yawn away in their offices until four o'clock, 'press of work' is ridiculous! I *am* disappointed, for he had the most *romantic* eyes, and *such* a smile! I had quite worked Reggie Farragut—who's just come home from Paris and does the cleverest, most indistinguishable portraits—up to painting him; but now I suppose it's no use. Every one is clamouring to meet him—Wayne, I mean—but he's refused everybody except the President, and his sister says wouldn't have accepted him, if it weren't obligatory. Of course, *that's* an affectation—every one knows how Lucia Herrington puts on airs about her family, though she herself would go to a Congressman from Oklahoma, if she was asked. However, it is true that the interesting brother is seen nowhere; except once in a while in the Park, walking with the little boy. Newspaper men have tried to sketch them—they're so absurdly, almost *weirdly*, alike; but nobody's succeeded yet. On the whole, I'm just as glad I haven't seen him myself—I feel I shouldn't like him so well out of flannels—in dark clothes, I mean to say. Which reminds me, Herbert has the most *adorable* new tweeds from abroad; an English tailor that's terribly exclusive, and (*cela va sans dire*) expensive, made them; and they *are* ducks! So ugly and foreign, you know, and simply *beautifully* baggy—but there, I was talking about Mr. Wayne wasn't I? There's really nothing much more to say, except what the *Post* said last Sunday: that he's put the State Department on its feet and Society on its ear! And he has done that, exactly, my dear, though the wording is rather vulgar, isn't it? Somebody told Herbert that the President himself said there

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had been no such achievement as this Bureau—not the way Mr. Cornish handled it, but since Mr. Wayne has come in—within the last three Administrations. All the Parties are after him to run for things—but of course you know that, if you see the papers—and he won't accept a *thing*! Really, as I've often said, there is something *weird* about him."

Certainly his uncle thought so. When Nicholas Wayne stood by and watched Randal tranquilly bring order out of a chaos that had been the cumulation of the eighteen months since he had refused the Bureau in the first place, when he watched him sit serenely in his office and without raising his voice or even looking up, drawl a set of orders colossal in conception and in probable effect, yet apparently of no especial consequence to Randal—the Secretary used to hold his breath. It was one thing to beg Randal to employ his own method; quite another, breathlessly to watch him do it. But one fact stood forth out of the bewildering process, incontrovertible: Randal was a bigger man than his uncle, a bigger man than any in the country. His uncle acknowledged it, and acknowledged it proudly, since it redounded the more to the fame and glory of the Family. In these dazzling days there was no question of bygones, no question of anything save the meteoric marvel of Randy's success and the all-important issue of Randy's future. Nicholas Wayne thought and talked about it—to every influential man he could lay hands on; the aunts and underuncles wrote volumes on the subject; and Lucia was everywhere asking people to agree with her about it. "Off there for ten years, living a regular hermit's life," she would exclaim with a rapturous plaintiveness, "and now he's come back, and in two months—think of it—two months—unravelled the most difficult

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situation in politics!" She did not remember, fortunately for other people's enjoyment, that the most difficult situation had been in the first place created by a Wayne; that the Bureau had been no one's scheme but Nicholas's. "You see how it is, don't you?" she would conclude triumphantly. "He's a genius! That's the only way one *can* explain it. The way he's done things simply baffles everybody."

And that was true; it did. All excepting one far-away dark-eyed Englishwoman, who when she read the American papers, smiled quietly, and understood.

And how did the situation appeal to him?—him, sitting day after day calmly within his office, never stirring from his straight desk-chair, except to greet a visitor. How did it appeal to him, whose unchanging quiet and unfailing courtesy formed not the least part of his puzzling originality to American men of bluster and "no time"? Was he weary with it all—bored—amused?

"I don't believe you care a damn about the whole business," Nicholas Wayne said to him disappointedly one evening. "Any other man in Christendom would have gone mad with the victory of it—and so, of course, have lost everything; but you just take it all as—as, I suppose, you took being a consul and doing nothing. It's a matter of very little interest to you." He spoke regretfully; for in spite of his pride in Randal it seemed almost a pity that the wonderful success should not have come to some one who would have appreciated it sufficiently to go mad over it—some one to whom the present phase would have appeared but as a stepping-stone, who would have kept both eyes always on the future. But that was the one irritation the Secretary still felt with Randal; he could not get him to show any concern, any thought even, for his future. When

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he spoke of it—as he did systematically every day—Randal would merely smile at him, with that tranquil detached affection he always showed the Head of the Family, and reply that one's future was such a settled thing, just as one's past had been—why leaden one's brain with going over it?

All of which the Secretary put down to Oriental evasion. During the two months of his watching Randal, Nicholas Wayne had come to know him rather better; which, with Randal, meant a good deal less. The straightforward American had often had occasion to ponder over that hint of Zona's—"You must remember that he has an entirely different set of motives from yours"; and when he wrote to Zona, as he did with almost pathetic fidelity, the Secretary had more than once acknowledged the help of her analysis. But what—the question now was—were Randal's motives? Did he have any? Certainly the dominant theme of his present course seemed unprogressive potentiality; Randal had apparently no thought of going further—or of going back.

"I believe what you need is a vacation," decided his uncle, as his remark concerning Randal's non-interest went unanswered. "There is nothing like a change of scene to give one new perspective; and you've been sticking to the office like a drudge ever since Christmas. Why not take a run down to Florida? The season's practically over, and you'll meet none of those wretched society leeches you're so sensible in avoiding. Then, if you felt like it, you could go on down to Havana and look over that matter we were speaking of last night. Your presence down there would be a very good thing just at this time. Not a bad idea, eh?" He glanced at his nephew anxiously.

"Say yes, Uncle Randy," put in Dal eagerly—it was

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after dinner and the three were in the library. "Then you could take me to see Lilith! My holidays begin the sixth of March—that's just next Tuesday—and Lilith's been asking mother for ever so long. Do say yes!"

Uncle Randy looked at the Head-Uncle. "Should you like me to take him to see Lilith?" he asked quietly. "If his mother approved should you think it a good idea?"

"Yes, yes, Uncle—you would, wouldn't you? 'Cause you said, you and mother, you'd be only too delighted—you told Lilith I was rather a problem!" The round hazel eyes reminded Uncle earnestly. "And if Uncle Randy would go with me," he added, dancing about ecstatic with his imaginings, "if we could all be at Lilith's house together, we could have a *beau*-tiful time! We could catch all the best tadpoles out of Lilith's pond and bring 'em home to you," he concluded on a wave of dazzling generosity. "Lilith said there were tadpoles, real fat ones—but scan'lous slippery. Jus' the same, we'd bring you home some—a whole lot, in a bottle."

Uncle gnawed the ragged corner of his moustache; since he had seen Uncle Randy with Dal, he did not laugh so much. "I—I should enjoy the tadpoles very much," he said politely, "though—they would be hardly necessary; you might have some trouble with them on the train—if they got away, you know. But about this plan"—he drew his shaggy brows together thoughtfully—"this visiting idea, I'll have to talk with your mother. Yes, I'd have to talk with Lucia," he turned to Randal. "Of course, Lucia wanted to go to Atlantic City, over Easter, if I could get away; and I"—he smiled grimly—"agreed with her that it was a good idea. The sea-air, she thinks, does my temper good, and I daresay it does. God knows I need

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something—after sixty-nine dinners and twenty-six receptions this season! Perhaps, if you could take the boy down—provided, of course, that it was convenient for Mrs. Armistead to have him just now—and, er—leave him "—the Secretary's face was averted from Randal's—" while you went on to Cuba, it might be the best thing all round."

" The best thing all round," repeated Randal almost mechanically. " Yes, I think you are right. But I should have to go soon," he added, " almost at once, if I am to do the Cuban business any good. There would be hardly time for you to write and get an answer from —Mrs. Armistead."

" Um-m!" Again the Secretary gnawed his moustache, gazing at Dal not unkindly—though the child was tapping his arm excitedly; a habit the Family found particularly " wayward."

" I tell you what I think," he said finally; " if Lucia's willing he should go, I'll send him down to Mobile with Jonas—there are some things about the house there that I've been wanting Jonas to attend to—and then you can go on ahead and see if it's all right for Jonas to bring him down. It wouldn't be too much out of your way, New Orleans?" he added, again averting his eyes from Randy's—the Secretary was sincerely fond of Randy.

" No." It was the new self whose round glance blazed almost adoration on the white-haired diplomat's head. " No, it wouldn't be out of my way—at all. You'll speak to Lucia then," he rose, as though something suddenly compelled him to be alone, " and I'll see to getting the Bureau matter completed."

" Are we going, Uncle Randy?" Dal ran after him into the hall. " Are we going—to see Lilith? To be with her all the time?"

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"We're going to see her, yes, Light of Heaven"—through the dim-lit hall, Uncle Randy's eyes met Dal's very wide and bright—"and we shall be with her for a while—for a while, though not all the time—yet. One day"—he picked the boy up in his arms and looked very tenderly at him, tenderly and seriously, so that Dal listened carefully to every word—"one day we shall be with her all the time; when the wheel shall have gone round for the last time—and we are no longer racked upon its spokes. You will remember that, my Big Little Son—one day we shall be with her all the time. We shall all be together—at last."

"I will remember," promised Dal, feeling very solemn, as he always did when Uncle Randy called him "my Big Little Son." "Uncle Randy, I wish we could go to see Lilith together now"—he slipped down out of Uncle Randy's arms a bit mutinously—"I do so hate always having to go with Jonas! Jonas snuffles so!" he explained disgustedly. "Couldn't I go with you?"

"I'm afraid not, old man; but you'll be only a few days behind me, and then you know I shall want you to bring me some things from the house in Mobile. Don't you remember that old teakwood pipe we forgot—the one I thought would make such splendid soap-bubbles? And there was Wrinkles' blanket, and his second-best collar—really, if you didn't go and get those things I don't know who would." Uncle Randy regarded Dal dubiously.

"I'll go," said Dal with an heroic sigh, "if there's only me to do it, Uncle Randy, I'll go. But Jonas must be very 'spectful to me," he added belligerently once more; "he mustn't always call me 'baby,' and tell me what to do. I don't like being *told*, Uncle Randy; I like being 'dvised."

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" I see," said Uncle Randy soberly. And then he did leave Dal, as he had started to before, and went off to be alone.

And so arrangements crystallized. Lucia was graciously pleased to assent to what was " really my own plan, long ago, you remember " ; and in view of Uncle Randy's immediate departure, Dal—to his intense satisfaction—was allowed to leave school a few days before his holiday actually began. Jonas packed the trunks, including Randal's—of which there were a number, as he had decided to remain South for about a month, and would be staying in various climates—and by the end of another day they were ready to start; though, still—to Dal's regret—separately.

Wayne's last day in the Bureau was merely an exaggeration of what other days had been ; at the end of it —the technical ending, that is—he sat alone, and very thoughtful. His first assistant, a most competent person, had brought the day's report, and received final instructions to cover the period of his chief's absence ; the head clerk had been in, with the last cables ; an Associated Press-man had come for information. Still Wayne sat there ; narrow-eyed, speculative, in his hard office chair. Through the closed windows the incessant creaking of the Avenue cars came to him, still stridently ; the click of horses' shoes upon the asphalt, the whirr and snort of many kinds of motors ; the hoarse yet piercing yells of newsboys crying out the last edition ; even occasionally a voice raised in excitement or in protest till it whined itself six stories high—and beat upon the ears of Randal Wayne. Yet they called it an old-fashioned city, Washington !—a sleepy place, where not much business went on, and few Americans found it " stren-

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uous enough." The man in his office chair wheeled about and opened the door into the outer room; though it was some time after closing hours, the clerks still lingered, bent feverishly over typewriters and records and ledgers, intent on "getting all they could" out of the day, and so eventually meriting more money. Randal Wayne regarded them, out of the eyes that had not lost their shutting scrutiny—even with America. He saw the rushing fingers, heard the click of rushing machines, felt the heat of rushing imaginations—rushing to what? Promotion. And then what? Promotion. And after that? Always promotion.

His own overtime task, the evening mail, lay behind him on his desk; but for a long time he sat there heedless of it—staring ahead of him into that noisy, fevered outer room, that America in little—until the last ambitious man had left, until like everything in the end, that place too was futile, shorn of energy. And even then—for almost an hour—the piles of papers on his desk lay there untouched, disregarded—while the narrow eyes concentrated, like Lilith's on the ivory ball; and he saw what was—not quite—past. A garden, with its heavy sweet breezes of sandalwood, roses and thyme, its closing lotus flowers; a harbour whose great sampans swayed at anchor sleepily; a high white house, empty, save for a nodding red-capped boy and the faint scratch-scratch of a soothing persistent pen; a silent wide veranda with couches, and a long chair pushed near the railing: all that was still still, still. Still—and without ambition; where a thousand years succeeded a thousand years, and men remained the same—unpromoted.

"It has been a pleasant jest," murmured the old self drowsily; "something to smile over when the days are extraordinarily hot. Myself in an American

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office, an American success—quaint!" And mechanically the old self reached for a cigarette—damn the boy!—he had forgotten them.

"But Lilith"—the new self sat upright with a sudden pallor—"if two months has been long—and her new self, what will it have?"

"I am to leave the child with Lilith," he answered slowly, the wonderful smile softening his fine mouth; "it will be the best thing all round," he finished dully, after a moment. "When I am gone back, the child will come, to be with her. In time perhaps this new self and the child will have merged for her into one. In time the two may actually have become one." The old self was almost sure that it would be so. And after another long moment of deliberation he turned to his desk, and began very rapidly to sort out letters.

Until midnight he sat there (he was to take a train that left at two o'clock in the morning) reading, writing and filing away; noting all he did on a long pad at his side until midnight. Then he drew his block of paper to him for the last time and wrote this: "You asked me to pull the Bureau out of its hole, and I have done it; you desired me to organize it anew, to make it, and you have said that I have succeeded. The Bureau is yours; I have trained my first assistant to handle it as I have handled it—but it will always go on being yours—and the family's. And I am, once more, going to be my own. Sometimes you have asked what it all meant to me: something to get away from. Sometimes you have asked me what the future stood for: the past, to get back to! When you read this, I shall not be on my way to Cuba, but on my way to San Francisco—to the East. Once more I am going to be my own, absolutely; the property of my old self. You will forgive me, will you not? And allow me, as

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a last kindness, that the boy Dal shall make Lilith a very long visit?"

With a deep breath he folded the letter, addressed it and put it carefully away in his pocket. He would post it from New Orleans; after he had gone ahead, and arranged for the boy to come. But he had wanted to write it now; to finish up and put aside all the affairs and relations of this seething turbulent two months, before he went to be a little while with Her. He was relieved that the Secretary and Lucia had gone to a fashionable reception—in the morning they had expected him home before they should leave. And the boy, Dal, would be asleep; it was better so. Everything was arranging itself undisturbingly.

He picked up his other letters and dropped them in the mail-box. Then, with a faint sigh, he closed his neat, crowded desk, locked it and, looking about him like a prisoner who desires only to forget what he is leaving, took up his hat and went out.

As he went, a little brown dog crawled out from the most comfortable—the only comfortable—corner of the room and trotted after him, blinking with sleepiness.

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CHAPTER VIII

"YOU will come in with me, and wait, no?" Lilith paused a moment by the worn cathedral steps. "It will be only a little half-hour, and—oh, Zona *mia*, if you were but a Catholic! Here in the church where our mothers used to pray." The long eyes sought her cousin's beseechingly.

"I will come in," said Zona hastily. "While you are at confession, I will—I will try to pray." During the two months since they had been in New Orleans, Zona had often tried to pray; had yearned in painful dumbness for the relief of a self-expression that also shifts responsibility. To-day she felt that relief *must* come; speech, even inarticulate, *must* slacken the strain of repression she had been under, with her watchfulness. "When the crux comes—as it must, sooner or later—she will turn to you." Why had the Secretary said it?—"A great deal, perhaps everything, Zona, will depend on what you answer her."

"Are you not coming in then?" Lilith reminded gently.

And Zona followed her into the dim, gray vaulted solemnity of the cathedral. Some long buried instinct—joined to that possessing sense of her individual insufficiency—made her want to dip her fingers in the holy water, also cross herself and bend the knee; take part, belong, give herself up entirely and unquestion-

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ingly as Lilith did, and so receive Lilith's comfort. The ironical probing smile of her father was very far from her, in these days.

"I will wait for you here," she whispered, slipping into a bench before the altar of St. Ursula—the altar where "our mothers used to pray." "Do not hurry—I shall like to have a long time." And she smiled almost wistfully at Lilith; almost wistfully watched her move slowly down the side-aisle and enter the confession-box.

How much did she tell?—how much omit? Zona had often wondered. Herself a thing no longer, but a woman, and a Tanguey woman, self-confessed, she wondered how much she would have told, had she been Lilith, and the outlet of the sympathetic ear, the sealed lips, hers. She looked at the bent head, the murmuring sad lips, which from her corner she could just see; and she wondered.

Since they had come to New Orleans—that place alone in America which is yet wholly un-American—Lilith had changed; an enigma still, she had grown simpler. Sometimes when Zona saw her in the mantilla, standing majestic beneath the arcades of their grandfather's house, or sipping sherbet against the quaint iron grating of some ancient *pâtisserie*, it seemed as though she had never seen her anywhere else; as though Lilith had never been anywhere else, than in the languorous sleepy-voiced city of lattices and flowery inner courts. The black lace gowns she had adopted as a matter of course, the rosary and worn black breviary she carried constantly—even when going merely to Canal Street for some bit of lace or silken stuff—her soft voice fluent in the difficult Creole patois—and, above all, her inimitable manner of making one, in composition, with the red-tiled Spanish roofs, the

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stuccoed archways, and the sunny old levees, pronounced her indisputably the Spanish matron. And the servants in the old house on the Bayou road, and the dusky-eyed flower girls with their jasmine and roses, the merchants from whom she bought colour, and the beggars to whom she gave pence, bowed down to her and reverenced her with the gloating servility of the low in caste for the highest; vied with each other in recognizing and enthroning the aristocratic native, who had seen New Orleans for the first time in her life two months before!

It was a paradox of humour, the situation; a humour to whose skirts clung tragedy—when John Armistead talked of taking her away. And this morning, making a brief stay on a flying trip to Texas, he had talked of it so decisively that the threatening resentment behind Lilith's eyes broke (as Zona had been fearing that it would) into a perfect storm of refusal.

"You imagine you have merely to say to me go, and I will go?" she had demanded, facing him with the outraged imperiousness of royalty attacked. "I, who am your wife," the dignity with which she spoke of the relation had made Armistead regard it for the first time with some awe; "you say will do this, will do that; will go here, or go there, according to your desire alone?—*Dios de mi vega!* Am I then your slave?"

Often she had declared herself to be, he might have told her—had not he been too bewildered by the outburst to answer anything; almost he would have preferred one of those exaggerations of "Spanish lingo" to this more—and less—comprehensible exhibition of Spanish temper. That was all you could call it, John Armistead had reassured himself, temper; and temper

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was one of the things for her lack of which he had married Lilith. Like her father, he began to distrust this city of swamp and sinister cypress trees, whose strange glamour was converting the woman he had known so entirely into a foreign, puzzling creature of moods and startling defiance. When he left her, sombre-eyed and silent once again, he was the more determined to get her away from the spell which he was sure came from vagaries of climate; climate, and a new, uncharacteristic melancholy that had been fertile ground for morbid suggestion. Yes, he would take her away; the old house of her grandfather's which he had made it possible for her to reclaim and open—an unhealthy fancy from the first, and quite unnecessary with an hotel like the *St. Charles* in town—he would shut up again, and leave in charge of servants. They—he and she—would go back to the ranch, to the open of keen air and enormous spaces, and rugged hard-riding appetite; directly this oil complication was settled, and they had got Zona and Maddox married, they would go back.

Somewhat comforted by this assurance, he had left her; flinging back over his shoulder that he would be back in two days.

"Two days! He will be back again." The heavy, smouldering eyes had lifted wearily to Zona. "But"—the volcano threatened fire again—"he will never get me away from here, never."

And Zona, in her bench before the altar of St. Ursula, was constrained to think that he never would. That was why she longed to pray—the haunting constraint of feeling things closing up, hemming them all in, Lilith and John Armistead and her; the helpless sense of availing nothing, in the embrace of factors that were working mercilessly and with no loop-hole

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for resistance—that was why she, too, longed for the counsel of the confessional.

Yet, when she thought it over logically, outside of the Armisteads' brief clash that morning, there was nothing to make her so nervously on the alert. She and Lilith were there in the fascinating old home of their grandfather, of their mothers, living quietly, simply; growing to know the place of their ancestors and each other, with an increasing fondness and dependence, but doing nothing abnormal—seeing no one who might prove disturbing. That was the word: disturbing. In spite of all logic to the contrary, the atmosphere they breathed was disturbing—its quietness sullen, like the brooding smoke of Lilith's eyes; smoke that would lift itself instantly, that was but a curtain uncovering fires as old as they were relentless. What did they imply, those eyes? A woman no longer easy to satisfy, for one thing. A woman no longer easy to direct and govern. With every day's disclosure—and to these disclosures Zona was growing more and more sensitive—the younger girl felt a tightening of endurance on the part of the married woman, a tightening which inevitably would snap—and torture some one. "It is not that she is difficult with me," she wrote Maddox, "for she is the sweetest thing in the world—tragically sweet, it seems always; but I have the feeling that she is nearing the end of control—that she is nearer and nearer every hour—and so is drawing us nearer to—something: I cannot tell what. I am glad that you will have finished your trip and will be here in a few days. You do displace worry so substantially!"

Even the letter he wrote her in return (and which at that moment she held tucked jealously between two of lesser importance) had restored her inborn practical

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sense—for an hour or two. Then, when she came upon Lilith gazing into the ivory ball—with an exultation on her lips that staggered with its triumph—when a few minutes later Lilith had come to her, if anything quieter than ever, and asked her to go to church—to confession—Zona was swept again into the wretchedness of anticipation which hung over her until sometimes she doubted her own sanity.

The enigma was simpler; and so every day more complex of solution. Lilith loved, resented, would in time hate—with an unconcealed finality that baffled answer. But—when her evolution should be complete, when the Spanish should assert itself absolutely, and demand satisfaction—what was she going to do?

With an exhausted little collapse of imagination, Zona fell at last upon her knees before the peaceful picture of St. Ursula. If only she were a Catholic! A woman who had come in and knelt in front of her—a quadroon, probably, with her thick veil and graceful, shrinking carriage—had risen and was going out, straighter, more alive, somehow indescribably renewed; what would not she—Zona—give for the assurance that was there before her on the simple white altar, which others—but not she—knew how to take!

Her own happiness, still unbelievable in its encircling wonder, the yearning tenderness for Lilith that was so often almost terror for her, all the unexplored valley of emotion that Zona was entering yet cautiously, merged into one great desire: a religion. Her eyes fell on the little lapis cross that Elena Tanguey had placed, all-trustingly, at the feet of the family saint "for the recovery of my beloved brother Diego." And had Diego recovered? "But certainly!" Lilith had averred, when she asked. "Did not madre give the cross?" The sublimity of ignorance appealed

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with singular suggestion to the girl whose intelligence brought her no help in her successive crises. To have that something to lean upon—to be absolutely, fanatically sure of: the Church!

In the choir near by the organist had entered and was practising softly; the painfully sweet strains came with a soothing cadence to the lone worshipper before the altar of St. Ursula. She looked up. In the next chapel mass was being said, a huddled knot of Creoles, Americans, Irish, bending devotedly above their breviaries, as they followed the feeble incantation of the tottering old priest; farther down a first communion class sat solemn under the instruction of a Jesuit brother, in his close black gown, round the high altar an acolyte was tip-toeing with his long taper, his coarse lace smock and bright red cassock emphasizing him a tiny brilliant speck in the vast hazy gray of the colonnaded spaces; while always, but a step away, there was the hushed confession-box—Father Bartholomé, Father Jerome, Father Matthieu—waiting; listening and waiting—if there were only some one to whom she could go now. The Church seemed to have put its strong compelling arms beneath her, to be raising her weakness into a determination. "My mother said that at last every one goes! There is something—I do not know—but there is something that makes us." Zona knew quite well; the something was fear.

Her mind seized upon the remembrance of Lilith's confessor—a grave-faced, kindly man, who had come to see them shortly after their arrival, and Lilith's first going to church. He remembered their mother. Would he—could he help her? Would he consent to hear her even, since she was not a Catholic? At any rate the chance was worth improving. Yes, she would

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ask Father Bartholome to see her, before he left the cathedral. She would wait until he had finished hearing confession, and then—— But could any consolation come, any understanding, from a source outside, of those grim factors that were working, working; closing in and shutting down, with no other law than their own incontestability? But if they closed completely—if the real crisis came and Lilith turned to her, as the Secretary had said she would—what would Zona say? What would she say? She must ask Father Bartholome, now! Impulsively, hysterically almost, she half rose. A long slender hand pushed her back. "I am here, my most patient one; do not go yet a few moments, I am here." And as Lilith knelt beside her, Father Bartholome left the confession box, and passed by them toward the sacristy.

Zona's face, hidden on her crossed arms, was convulsed. The last door had shut. The last ear was turned away. For intuitively she felt that to-morrow held no chance. What was written was written to-day. "Nor all thy piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line." Practical, downright, often scornful Zona shuddered; in the overwhelming stillness of the church she longed to scream. Perhaps the father had not left the sacristy, if she hurried. But the long slender hand held hers tightly. The two women knelt together in the place where their mothers used to go and pray for consolation.

And the mothers? Elena, crucified by the chill unsympathy of the North and a Protestant husband; Nanon, worn to almost as early a death by the gloom of an isolated life and an ironical, literary husband. Always by a husband, whom for some swift reason or other they had married, and as surely and eternally resented.

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Of a sudden "husband" seemed a very sinister word to Zona; entirely at variance with that other idea, "the man one loves." Would Roger——? But it was not Maddox who harassed her with insinuation that afternoon, who came between her and the plaintive melancholy organ tones, between her and the serene placidity of gentle St. Ursula. It was themselves—the three of them—Lilith, John Armistead, and she who rose in ever increasing menace of disaster. Themselves, and one other, who since Christmas Eve had come to be her friend. Why did he project so insistently upon her premonition—he whom they never mentioned, she and Lilith, except when letters came telling of his phenomenal achievement and success? Why should he intrude, who seemed so carefully to be immolating himself?

The clasping slender hand had released hers. She glanced up; Lilith was telling her beads. Absorbed, childishly impressed with her own devoutness, her exquisite profile softened of its new rebellious look, the woman was for a moment wholly the Catholic; but still through the black gossamer of her mantilla shone the gorgeous, pointing mass of hair, pagan in its barbaric splendour.

"Shall we go?" whispered Zona desperately, after a time.

"Wait, just a moment"—she took Zona by the hand and led her down directly in front of the altar—"let us just say a prayer here, at the feet of the blessed saint, and then——" She bowed her head. The choir boys were chanting the Credo; in the next chapel the Host was being elevated—the little bell rang softly shrill—"Pray with me," begged Lilith, her voice trembling suddenly, "pray with me—to the saint of all our family—pray!"

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And Zona prayed, for the first time since her mother's long-ago death. With that hand clinging to hers imploringly, the memory of those smouldering smoke-veiled eyes, how could she keep from praying—how resist the prayer that came to her, the one other woman of the family left?

The pitiful sweet smile of the virgin saint fell upon them as it had fallen upon their mothers, as it fell upon all women who loved and agonized—peacefully, changelessly, a little vaguely. Be good, it seemed to say, do right; and so discharged its duty. Good—right! Zona remembered the day when, for her too, the words had been as fixed as stones beneath a house; was she better off now that she had learned to shift foundation? With a fierce little motion she reached out and caught Lilith's arm. "Let us go," she entreated; "let us go at once."

"Very well," said Lilith strangely. "I am ready. See—it is the Benedicite!" As the old priest in the next chapel made the sign, she bent suddenly and pressed her lips to the little lapis cross upon the altar, kissed it passionately as though it were alive. Then she followed Zona obediently out of the church.

They had walked across the old square, and were about to get into their carriage before either of them spoke. Resolutely Zona turned their minds to the trivial.

"Shall we stop at Corbeau's for the ring for Dal? His birthday will be here in a day or two, you know."

"*Si*, let us stop." Lilith's eyes lightened with pleasure; her speech took on the Spanish accent that always came to it with emotion of whatever sort. "He said he would have something of a real beauty to show us; and I would not have my child enjoy his twelve years without a message from me, no."

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Always she spoke of him very simply that way—"my child." Had not his own mother suggested it? "If only she—his mother—would let him come to visit me," Lilith sighed. "*Si*, we will stop at Miché Corbeau's!"

So Zona gave the order to the coachman.

"And you had letters this afternoon, my Zocita." Lilith's voice was as sweetly expressionless as in the days before the volcano had come to slumber guardedly behind her eyes. "You heard from your lover, yes?"

"Yes." Zona wished she did not feel so totally ashamed, so greedy in her freedom to be loved. "I—I heard from the Secretary too," she added hastily. "He says again that he—Mr. Wayne—is doing marvellously; that he is the biggest man in Washington, outside actual Congressional circles—that he has made the Bureau into a spectacular triumph for the Secretary as well as himself, and all in such a little while—two months! Isn't it wonderful!"

"You are surprised, then?" returned Lilith slowly.

"Oh no—no; that is, no one would have expected him to readjust himself so readily, after all those years in the East, and then take hold of such a muddled problem as the Bureau undoubtedly was; it is rather unusual, isn't it?"

Lilith drew her mantilla closer about her face. They were turning into crowded Canal Street.

"It is wonderful, *si*," she admitted proudly. "But a problem—what is that to him?"

And Zona knew that if Wayne had committed murder, the implicit confidence would have been the same. There was nothing partial in Lilith's composition.

"And did he say nothing else about—Randy?"

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"I don't think so"—Zona's conscience pricked her for the white lie, but not so poignantly as formerly—"except that the Secretary is trying to get him to take a vacation." The day the Secretary had written, the vacation idea had just dawned upon him. "As far as society's concerned, you know, he will see nobody—go nowhere. He has scarcely left the office for two months, the Secretary says."

"He will see nobody—go nowhere." A little smile of elation curved Lilith's mouth as she stepped out to buy the boy Randal's present.

"You have the ring, Miché—the Chinese ring, like you promised?"

"Thaz right, madame, I mague jus' lig' I promise. Ol' Corbeau done gone to Chinese owze—to thad owze in Ri'Royale, lig' madame say. Madame can truz ol' Corbeau. *Ouala la bague*—wad you thing? *La belle c'ose*, eh?"

"*Mais, si!*" Lilith took up the ring and examined it with an all-attentive interest; Miché must take it to the light; must weigh it and test again the size; must tell her in detail all that went on between him and the Chinaman whose shop was hidden behind the laundry in the Rue Royale—everything, everything that concerned her purchase, like the true Spanish woman, she must know.

And Miché was duly ready and eager to impart.

Zona took a chair by the window, with the mechanical acceptance of one used to the process. Much of her day was spent looking up and down the humming, parasol-crowded thoroughfare, where Creoles and Americans met under the sloping balconies, and dickered like Orientals over their trading; where club-houses turned out their small-waisted elegants, and glittering bars received them; where flower girls

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loitered, tying up their knots of violets, and the prospering beggar lay in wait for the stranger within his gates, generally the gates of the magnificent *St. Charles*, where once had been old M. Percy's cabbage garden, and where now John Armistead longed to transfer his wife from the ancient house on the Bayou road. Zona looked up towards the big hotel with an unreasonable feeling of hostility; she and Lilith had been very happy in the home of their own, very happy in spite of that prevailing atmosphere of threat, she reflected. If only they could be rid of that, the oppression that had possessed her in the cathedral was lightening now, she felt that she had been over-sensitized emotionally, absurd almost. And Lilith's odd insistence that she should pray—she glanced at her cousin, engrossed with the old silver merchant's rambling account—a mere whim, a sudden superstition, no doubt, such as the Tanguey women had by the dozen. Zona shook herself, feeling rather the fool.

"I'm going out to buy a *dulce*, Lilith," she called, all at once young and light-hearted again. "I'll get you one too, shall I?"

She went into the street, smiling frankly with her own happiness, was about to consult with the old woman who sold sweets, when, coming towards her from St. Charles Street, she saw a figure. A man's figure, tall and negligently slender, coming towards her steadily, it seemed to Zona relentlessly. It could not be—she peered at him who did not see her—it could not be, and yet——

With white cheeks she flew back into the jeweller's. "Come," she was dragging Lilith quickly out of the side door, "come at once. We must go home; we must not stay any longer here. I will return to-morrow and pay Miché for the ring—only come."

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"But I have paid him." Lilith gazed at her astounded as they were driven swiftly up a back street. "I was but warning him about the box, that he should send a Chinese one. What have you, my cousin?" When she had been talking the Creole patois, Lilith's English became almost literal translation. "Is it that you are ill?"

"Yes—yes, I am ill. That is it, I am ill—nothing much, you know, just a headache; but a bad headache—oh, Lilith!" Her head really was swirling. What was she to do? For it must have been—though it could not be—there were no two figures in the world like that, except for one much smaller. Things were shutting down, closing in. The crux was there, upon them. "And when it comes, she will turn to you. A great deal—perhaps everything, will depend on what you answer her."

She leaned her head upon her hand and tried to control its buzzing. Once before she had failed Lilith; she must not fail her now. For Zona had the consciousness that this was the last test. And if she did not meet it steadily, if she did not rise to the service demanded of her, her own marriage, her whole life thereafter would be shorn of its satisfaction, would be worse than dead fruit.

And John Armistead would be home in two days! There was no time, no time; and the gleam in Lilith's eyes—what was Lilith going to do? All the way out on the dusty road her thoughts locked wheels with themselves; came together and clashed, like the forces that were coming together, that were closing in, leaving no way out. If Maddox were only there—but a glimpse of the red lips of the woman next her—the lips of a creature about to spring—told her that Maddox would be of no more avail than she, who

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would yet be called upon to decide. It was the very acme of cruelty—that she should decide—the triumph of that fiendish plan which was drawing them all toward—what?

The carriage stopped with a lurch. Lilith got out, and went up the steps to the broad pillared veranda, like a blind person it seemed to Zona, whose sixth sense was on edge. At the door, a servant met her. Zona put out her hand and took hold of a chair. The plan was maturing, closing up, and shutting down.

"A gemmen was h'yah, Miss Li'th—a real tall gemmen. He says he goin' a come back agen."

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CHAPTER IX

IT was just sunset when Wayne came up the broad brick walk to the old Tanguey house. He was a few minutes later than he had intended to be; for after he had got into his carriage and was well on the way out the Bayou road, something had called him back—to post a letter he had left at the hotel. It was the letter which clinched his decision to return to the East—a wholly new distrust of his own strength of purpose made him put it in the box before he went to Lilith; and when it was done he drew a long breath, like one who has shut a door irrevocably behind himself.

As he went up on to the veranda—the minute he saw her, and saw the evolution of her—he knew that his precaution had been none too stringent. For before even he spoke to her, the all-attentive gray eyes had taken in those changes which marked the enigma at once more simple and more complicated. He to whom alone—or perhaps together with a woman far across the seas—she had never been enigma, looked at her now for the first time uncertainly.

The stateliness in which she appeared as he came up to her gave him no hint; always she had been stately, unconsciously, serenely sure of herself. The mantilla, the black lace gown, the massive cathedral-like pillars that lent her background as she sat quietly with her hands folded, waiting, did but accentuate

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what he had recognized in her always. Except that she had not always been waiting. Yes, that was the difference. When she greeted him he was sure of it; for in every formal Spanish sentence there lurked the reminder of something she intended to do—something that these courtesies were merely tiding over.

Yet, consistently with all he knew of her (which was very nearly, though not quite, all there was of her) she accepted his being there as a matter of course——as simply as, the moment after, she explained her husband's being away. "And when you came before, we were in the church, no? That was the inexcusable. But we went to confess; to pray before the saint of our family. I was happy when the servant said you would return."

"Of course I would return. Did I not come to New Orleans but to see you?"

"And your possessions?"—she rose quickly, flutteringly; in spite of her assurance in her own house, there was still the old tide of rose through her cheeks, the swift green flash from under the long eyes—"your trunks have arrived, yes? I shall send my criado to fetch them, at once."

"My trunks are at the *St. Charles*. I am here for such a short time, you see, that——"

"You had actually the idea to go to an hotel? Here in this city of my grandfather and his grandfather? You insult me! One moment—I will send my criado."

As she disappeared within the house, through another window a girl came out. "Hush!" as he went forward, "she must not see me—she thinks I am upstairs with a headache; she must not know that I am here. But I heard your voice, so I came down; to remind you"—the small haggard face raised itself

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to him half fanatically—"to remind you. You promised me to take care of her, to help me take care of her, and now you must keep your promise. The time has come—she is slipping out of my hands, though she will ask me to decide; she is slipping out of my hands, as we all are slipping—into the hands of what? I tell you, you must help me. She is rising above my comprehension, but she will never rise above yours; do you understand? I have your word." It was no longer a girl's eyes that emphasized what she said; but the eyes of something old, something inexorable, that went out to him—and stayed, after she had vanished quickly as she came.

"She is slipping out of my hands, as we all are slipping—into the hands of what?"

The hands that "with earth's first clay did the last man's knead"; the hands that sprung the trap, that shut the lid—the old self knew. Ah yes! he knew. And he must help take care of her. The inexorable Thing had his word.

"You will take cordial with me, no?" Lilith had come back, followed by a graceful yellow girl, who curtsied as she poured out his liqueur. "And you tell me you are here for but a short time—why is that? Why can you not stay with us many days—that would be still so short?"

Why could he not, the old self questioned, watching her through shutting speculative eyes—the spider eyes. Why did he not? The criado was disappearing down the broad drive—after his possessions; this veranda also was white-columned and silent, with its screening magnolia trees and sleepy shaded garden; here, too, were soft-footed servants and long hours of inactivity; and—John Armistead was, as always, away. Why did he not stay, then? asked the old self.

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"You will take the boy and leave him with her while you go on; it will be the best thing all round."

"I must go on," the new self said steadily—aloud. "I wish that I might stay, but I must go on. However, I am to leave the boy Dal with you—for a long visit. You would like to have him?"

Even through her greater disappointment, Lilith's delight shone in her quickly green eyes. "To have him, to have my child—my most wonderful, my small Randal—to have him here, for a long, long visit, all to myself? Aih! It is too great a happiness! But when will he come? Did you bring him with you? Where is he now?" Impatient, intent, her face aglow with tenderness, she sat forward—beseeching detail.

"He is in Mobile, with Jonas; they should have arrived there last night. But he will come to you the minute I telegraph. His uncle arranged that Jonas should bring him. You would like me to telegraph to-night?"

"Yes, yes! At once—when Miguel comes back from the hotel with your trunks—so that we may have him here while you are here. You will not go so soon away, Randy?" She could have planned no more subtle tantalization for him than just that wistfulness in her soft voice.

"I must go—rather soon," he said, looking away from her. "To-morrow perhaps I can stay, until the child comes, but then——"

"Then we must send for him at once!" With that definite new assurance that characterized her, Lilith rose, speaking very swiftly, and with a determination that hinted always some idea, something she was going to do. "We will not wait for Miguel, we will send for him at once! He will get here to-morrow,

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and we shall all be together—for a little while at least; perhaps——" she broke off, though her eyes remained upon him with the Spanish woman's look of intrigue. He knew that in her mind she had resolved that they should be together longer.

"For a little while at least," he echoed—with a rather shadowy smile. "And then—at any rate we will telegraph." And he proceeded to write a message, in letters that were slightly uneven. "So!" He handed it to the servant she had called. "To-morrow he will be here, the small great one; and very soon—the next day, is it not? he will be twelve. Twelve! —but I do not notice that he grows much older; he will never grow very old, I think."

"Do you mean that he will die?" The woman's eyes had glazed with terror. "No—no, he cannot die—he shall not, my little one. It was not that you meant—say it!"

"Not that," repeated the even voice soothingly, "but just the opposite. He will always live—real youth is the only immortal."

"Ah! Yes." She sat back, satisfied. "He will always live—my child. But his mother, that is Mrs. Herrington, is heavenly good, to lend him to me—I must tell Zona—you will excuse me, no? She has had a diabolical headache this afternoon, my poor Zocita. She will be happier when she hears this wonderful news." And with the sweetest air of regretfulness in the world, she left him to make happy the poor Zocita.

And at dinner, it seemed, Zona was happy. At least she spoke of Dal's visit with a feverish enthusiasm, and laughed hysterically over Wayne's story of the tadpoles. Then she joined more normally in the talk of New Orleans and the old house, of the days

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when as a young man Wayne had come to visit for the balls, after their mothers were married and dead; when they themselves were girls with their hair in braids and were steadily refused to visit grandfather. They talked of the aunts, and the now distant, distant Christmas week; of Washington and the Bureau that was already the Secretary's tallest feather; of Lucia—Mrs. Herrington, you know of course—and of Mary's unrealized *weird* dinner; and then at last, they talked of the East.

John Armistead was not there. There was no one to arraign now that the girl with the small drawn face had come to understand the non-understandable; and the land of silent-smiling conundrum, the dripping drone-land of negation, received all its due from the three who dwelt upon it absorbedly—all its due, perhaps more; perhaps no more.

When later on they were drinking their coffee on the veranda: "I am going back to it," Wayne told them quietly. "To-morrow night I take the train for San Francisco. I am going back—to belong to myself again; to belong to the East, that is; to-morrow night."

A low exclamation cut the cloyant, warm night air—almost a snarl. "It is the small Miguel's dog," said Lilith levelly, an instant after: "he grows more and more sullen."

"More and more sullen," repeated Zona drearily. "And you really go back, Mr. Wayne, to-morrow night?"

"To-morrow night." Wayne could see the remindful eyes, inexorable through the dark.

Noiselessly a servant came out on to the veranda, bearing the momentous yellow envelope. "Foh Miss L'ith," he said softly; it was the criado who had brought Wayne's trunks.

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Things were closing up and shutting down.

"Bring me a candle then;" the senora's voice was vibrantly calm. "Ah!—it is from my husband. He says"—she looked from one to the other of them sombrely—"he will be home to-morrow night. He has finished earlier than he had expected and he will be home to-morrow night."

Zona rose, almost violently. "I am going up," she said, looking past Lilith at the man who had given his word. "My—my head is worse again. Good-night."

The man held the window for her with a grave deference. As he said good-night he put out his hand; and she took it.

When she had gone, he and Lilith sat for some moments in complete silence. The night was warm and very black; two tall companion cypress trees outlined themselves only as phantoms, forever alienated—by a distance of three feet.

"You did not tell me this afternoon that you were going back," at length the woman's stirring Latin voice accused him. "Why was that?" Never before had she questioned him.

"I cannot help going back;" for the first time too he was evasive with her; "I—you must trust me. I cannot help it."

"Do I then ask you to help it? Are you not your own, to command and obey—to send hither and thither as I send Miguel yonder? And I too am yours, to order where you will—aih! Randy!" In the darkness she had slipped down from her chair to a hassock at his feet; her mood changed swiftly from tumultuous rebellion to the most melting sweetness. "Is it that you can leave me so easily to go nine thousand miles away?" she murmured.

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Already, through all her sweetness, he saw a plan; not like the plan of those many others who had snatched at his interest as it was vanishing—not like them; for she knew instinctively that, for her, his interest would never vanish. That was why she had the plan; that, and a new magnificent jealousy for herself—the self that he had created, wakened rather. With the eyes that saw everything now he saw this: what she was going to do began to form unmistakably in his mind.

"I must leave you," he answered the plan haltingly, as though it hurt him. "I must leave you—Lilith."

He was about to raise her to her feet, but she was too quick for him. Kneeling there at his feet, she began to speak rapidly, vehemently, fluently; as two years ago, a year ago only, she would not have known how to speak. "And why? Why must you leave me whom you came to get? Can you say that you came to America for that Bureau, or to see your family, or for anything but me—me? Can you say it? No." The white, triumphant face lifted itself higher till he saw its quivering. "No, you cannot. Yet now you would go back without me, you would leave me whom you came to get, forever; *si*, it is forever you are going back. And you think you can make me believe that you want to leave me? No; something is making you, some one is forcing you. I say they shall not!" Now she rose to her full height and her quick breath came to him hotly, as she faced him in a majesty of defiance. "They shall not! I who know you as the God in Heaven knows me, yes, as a slave knows his master—or a man the house he dwells in—*I* am the one who shall say. It is I who shall decide if you will leave me!"

The volcano slumbered no longer; no longer the

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tigress crouched. Renunciation, melancholy, resentment—action! The soul that he had made stood forth developed. And the thrill of it lasted him forever.

"Sit down again, and I will tell you——" Once more her assertion gave way, to an appealing gentleness, as she took the long fine hand in both of hers—"I am not the same as I was when I came to Hongkong, no?"

"No," he said, drawing a very deep breath, "I think you are not."

"When I look back and remember those times," she went on dreamily, "it is to me as though I had come at last through purgatory, and was permitted to gaze in at Paradise. Just to gaze in, that was all—Randy; and then—such a little, little time it was—came hell, so black, so hopeless—aih! My mother knew it; all the Tangueys have known it; and so I had to know it. Since then, I am not afraid to die," she looked up simply. "Why should I be? Though I have sinned, though I have lied in confession"—her eyes grew wide with the realization—"I am not afraid. I know hell now *so* well, yes? You can understand. To-day I confessed at the church, I told my beads, I heard the Benedicite; and all the while I thought 'It is for the last time—no more shall I need you, no more need anything—for I am going to enter at last that Paradise into which, before I knew hell, I was only permitted to gaze from outside. I am going to enter it everlastingly,' I said—for you see, *caro mio*, I had the presentiment, the knowledge certainly, that you were soon to come. And now you are here." The mellow voice stopped, in the tale that was told; but took it up again with the Latin impulse to emphasize. "You are here; and my

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penance is ended. For you will talk no more of leaving me, no." Again that definite assurance, that resolute new certainty of self, that was the period to her completion.

He looked at her through the blackness, as nearly eagerly as he could look; but his word—the word he had given the girl upstairs—" She is rising above my comprehension, but she will never rise above yours! You must help me. You must keep your promise."

" Did you ever tell Zona all this ? " he asked slowly. " Did you ever ask Zona what she would do ? "

" My little girl ?—my Zocita ? " The long eyes turned to him amazed. " What would she know ? She is my cousin, she loves; but she is just a little child." Since they had come to New Orleans, Lilith had been so entirely the matron; Zona so entirely the young girl. It was the Creoles who had established that note of indulgent patronage in Lilith's mention of her.

" Nevertheless, I would ask her." He seemed to sink down in his chair, as though he was very weary.

" You are tired," the alert olive eyes made instant observation. " You took the long journey to come to me, and now I keep you here talking! Ah, how I am ingrate! But you shall go to rest, *caro mio*—I will send Miguel to wait upon you. And to-morrow we can——but to-morrow the child comes," she remembered suddenly. " Ah, Randy—if we could but take the child! "

He rose, almost swayingly. " If we could! " he repeated mechanically. " But I am afraid that—that I cannot. The child I must leave behind—to-morrow; it is the best thing all round."

As she saw his face pale with the thought, her arms went up to his shoulders, and she bit back the trembling

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of her own lips. "Perhaps later he can come to us," she comforted with a divine gentleness. "We must give him up now, though it is hard—aih, hard!—but perhaps later he can come."

"Perhaps." Gazing at her, the gray eyes filled with something as simply elemental as herself; the enormous restraint of the man dropped from him—beaten for the moment—and the hands that caught her arms, the tense, determined face that bent above hers for a moment, took—and gave—the due of the all-mastering flame. "There is forever something to be given up, is there not?" he spoke quietly as ever; "even something taken to be handed back again. But to-morrow you will have him; to-morrow he will be with you. And now will you come in with me a moment, that I may look at you before I sleep?"

They went and stood in the square old hall; and Wayne turned the lights up, as high as they would go. From the first he had enjoyed seeing her thus, the centre and magnet of all light, all flame; and to-night he saw her at her zenith—at the breathless point of her perfection.

And that she knew herself at last, and gloried in it, he knew also; if through him she had gone down through hell, through him too had she come into this sublimity of realization. There should be no anti-climax now; the gray eyes closed an instant.

But when he opened them again, and was about to say good-night, he felt her own fill with that unfailing instinct that was her one-time intellect—fill with a sudden horror and so cling to him.

"I—I saw again that dream," she gasped, "that dream, in which I never could reach you; though I went out to you, si. Aih, Randy—Randy—Randy! Promise me that you will keep your word—promise

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me that you will never fail me!" Her locked hands fell upon his breast, in a passion of entreaty. In all her terror there was a majesty, the sublime majesty of a blind person, led by hands he trusts entirely; led on and on, towards the precipice.

"I will keep my word," came through colourless lips, to her, and to the girl upstairs. "I promise." I will never fail you—Lilith." And he took the exquisite face between his hands and gazed at it until his fine enigmatic features grew almost deathly in their pallor. She would have the child; but he——?

"I am afraid—afraid——" It was the old Lilith who swept up the stairs when he released her—stumbling, tearing her gown in her instinctive haste to reach the other woman in the house; the one woman of her family left. "I am afraid, Zona!—my Zocita! Where are you? where are you, my cousin? I am afraid—for Randy—though he is right here, though he is to sleep in our grandfather's house——"

"It was the dream," moaned Lilith, now in her cousin's arms, "the dream I saw so suddenly, so clearly, Zona *mia*. And before, in the early evening, he said that he must leave me; it was not that he could leave easily, but that he must! God of my soul, am I going mad? What have I then that I should so doubt him?" She sat up very straight, like an empress reenthroned. "Did he not say to me! I will keep my word? I will never fail you?"

"Ah!" The eyes in the small haggard face burned brighter as they pierced the darkened room. "He said that? Then he will; he will keep his word and the responsibility will pass out of his hands." Things were closing up and shutting down; the way out was now a slit too small to squeeze through.

"Yes, yes—out of his hands. I must decide myself,

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is it not? But I have decided, or when has there been anything to decide? Was I not always his—the man I love? And now he is going back—forever, Zona; forever. Listen to me, Zona." The green eyes flared into hers frantically: "if this Roger Maddox were going back; if your lover whom now so soon you are to marry, but for some reason might not marry—if he were going back, to the East, going forever, what would you do, I ask you?"

It had come. Things had closed, shut; she was trapped. Zona pressed her fingers against her eyeballs, where something seemed to have snapped.

"If he were going forever, Zona, for ever, *si*!—What would you do?" The frantic eyes insisted on their answer.

In the guest room just next to them, some one closed a door.

"You do not answer." The long slender hand compelled her. "You must answer. What would you do?"

Zona gathered all her stubborn strength to fight the force that was trying to answer for her; the crux was there—the great decision hers. She would not fail either. Her lips stuck together, but she forced them open. Now she was ready. And, "I should go with the man I love," spoke the voice loudly over hers; "I should follow him—out to the East."

And Lilith reached up and half-strangled her, with ecstasy. "I knew you would say it, my cousin! I knew you would decide like that!"

But at the gray dumbness of Zona's face, she fell silent; and only when the girl suggested parrot-like that they should see to her packing did she rouse herself once more. She was about to leave Zona, that last one of her family, to go out. More than once during

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the preparation she paused, hesitated, flung her arms about her cousin yearningly. But Zona kept on, steadily packing, getting ready; her small hands so deft that it was evident they were hands as old as the ages, as old and as relentless.

All through the night the two women were there together, in the room where the inscrutable God of To-morrow smiled his beautiful, dreadful smile. And when the sun came up out of the East, and Lilith watched it, she heard Zona say—as from a great distance: "See, I am putting the God of To-morrow in a box by himself. He is the last thing I am packing."

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CHAPTER X

LILITH opened her eyes to the extent of their long width, and sat up. It must be almost noon, the sun was shining so warmly through the thin-slatted shutters. Randy would be up, waiting for her. She looked about the room outlined with trunks—*si*, it was the day. Randy would be waiting for her.

Her smile as she rang for her maid was tremulous in its thrilled expectation. Zona, the quaint old house she was leaving, that odd presentiment of the night before—all, all were forgotten in the encompassing joy that hovered tenderly, wistfully about her. What most women felt upon their wedding-morning Lilith felt upon this day of her "going out." It was the beginning; more the beginning for Lilith than for most women. For she knew herself for the first time. As she dressed, her mind travelled back to that strange period before—when she had walked about and answered people, and bought beautiful things; unrealizing, like a shade—in purgatory. Then had come the day when she saw the Most Beautiful Thing: a serene, still face with eyes that knew thoroughly, thoroughly: when the soul of her began to stir. After that—but why go over it all? She knew now. Everything was very clear, very clear; and to-day at last everything was complete; if only they might take the child. But jealously she put the thought of him away; as

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Randy had said, one must always give up something. And to-day, for a little while at least, they would all three be together.

"Give me my loveliest robe, Agnes—no, not black, nor yet white; I will have that one like pale flame, yes? The wonderful Chinese yellow, my little one. *Si!* I am beautiful, Agnes, no? Very beautiful?" The radiant, upturned face was not the face that had gravely surveyed itself in the mirror of a rose and white room, that had thought itself innocently, "Very pretty."

"Madame is beautiful like a spirit," whispered the maid, whose bright, black eyes had suddenly filled with fear. "Madame is almost too beautiful—like a spirit, *oui!*"

Lilith laughed deliciously. "As though one could be too beautiful, silly one! Too beautiful, to-day! Agnes, we are going on a journey to-day, oh, a very long journey, but so wonderful—you understand?"

"*Oui*, madame." Agnes too knew the Smile. She understood. With a little flurry of excitement she began gathering up the many fans that lay about the room.

"And my lovely old god is going with us—yes, he is here in this box. Zocita packed him for me; you might put the Chinese coat—the temple coat—to cover him, Agnes; he is so light, he might be injured, yes? And I will have him in my cabin; I will keep him close beside me all the way. Ah, Agnes!" She was so happy that she could not keep it from going out to everybody. "It is my birthday," she said simply, "my real birthday, Agnes, and"—she put her hands up to the marvellous gleaming hair—"I want everyone to feel it with me. *You* see, do you not?" she asked the face in the mirror exultantly. "To-day we

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are ourselves—we are like spirits—it is our birthday!"

And the face above the gorgeous Chinese yellow smiled back at her, ardently, yet shyly too, like a new-born thing; and with that smile still on her lips, she went down—to meet Randy.

Down, and into the long old-fashioned drawing-rooms; but he was not there. "*Caro mio,*" she called softly, looking out on to the verandas; but he was not there. Perhaps they were at breakfast, he and Zona—though it was so late—she hastened to the morning-room; no, he was not there. In the garden, then; that was it, of course, the garden—he would have gone to smoke his cigarette, or to walk with the little dog; but he was not there.

She stood by the huge oak on the edge of the garden, bewildered. Where was he then? Was he ill? The smile had faded into a great anxiety, as she hurried back and up the stairs. At the guest room door she listened a moment before knocking; it was very, very still.

"Randy," she called gently. "Randy." But there was no answer. Again she called—"Randy," and as she waited, the blood left her face until it was white, ashen. If she should find him—— But, no, she would not think it even. He could not have been ill so suddenly, last night he was quite well, though that pallor—desperately she pushed open the door. Then, as her eyes travelled eagerly about the room, as they came back and re-travelled it slower—always slower, and more staringly; as they took in the truth, the truth that was a lie, the woman in her splendid yellow gown sank down upon the floor, like one who has been struck across the face.

For he was not there. Neither he nor any trace of him was there.

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When she came back to merciless consciousness, Lilith started up—disbelieving. "Zona—Zona! It is not so!" She rushed into her cousin's room. "I know he is not gone, but tell me, Zona! Randy—where is he? I cannot find him—his things are gone—where is he? Zona!" The name rang through the house with a distraught shrillness. For Zona was not there. No one was there.

Lilith gave one terrorized glance about this second empty room, and rushed out of it again. At the door she met Miguel.

"Miss Li'th called? Miss Li'th seek?" The eyes like sloes betrayed nothing.

With a dignity that was infinitely pitiful, the señora drew herself up to her usual stately height. "No, no, I am not ill; I did not call, Miguel. But—where is the señorita? Where"—the controlled voice shook in spite of its effort—"is the gentleman, our guest? I can find neither of them, Miguel. Where are they?"

The one who had brought her the telegram looked at her with a gentle detachment. "Early this morning the señor calls to me," he said in Spanish. "In the night almost, it is so early, he calls to me to take away his things; and this"—with a shrug—"it was easy enough for me, as I had brought only the señor's bag to his room. His boxes being in the cellar of the *St. Charles*, I was to get them to-day; but to-day the señor will not. 'I am going away,' he told me this morning; 'it is necessary that I go sooner than I thought. You will tell the señora,' he said to me, 'it is necessary that I go, but tell her that the child will come.' That the señor said two or three times, señora, 'Tell her that the child will come.'"

But the señora had not heard beyond the first significant words. It is necessary! And last night, "I

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must leave you—it is that I must!" Her knees were giving way; but she looked at the Spanish servant calmly, out of her long, dead-gray eyes. "And the señorita?"

"The señorita, señora—I do not know. The señorita had coffee at ten o'clock and went out. I think she did not know the most illustrious señor guest was departed. The señorita wore the mantilla, and looked bad, señora; bad like my papa, when the ague came upon him."

"*Grazias, Miguello,* that is all." Was it truly the señora's beautiful soft voice that came so harsh?

He half turned. "And the señor, master," he said, for no reason in the world but that something told him to say it. "I am to meet the señor master at the five o'clock train, no?"

When the señora fixed her eyes upon him, he shrank from them. "Do as the señor your master has commanded you," she said stonily. But the Latin knew that she hated him; that she hated his suggestion and therefore him, and would always hate him. He had brought the telegram. He was to bring the master. He stole away downstairs like a guilty thing.

The señora's green, green eyes blazed after him.

Like one in a dream—was her dream then there? As her mother had said, the only real thing?—she went to her own room. The maid who was on her knees, packing some last few things, straightened up—and screamed.

"Madame!"

"Well then—what have you?" The face that had left her with that radiantly tender smile turned upon her now with numb lips. But the girl ran out of the room, crying.

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"It must be that I am no longer beautiful"—with dragging steps Lilith crossed to the mirror—"but yes, though I am dead, I am beautiful enough." The face above the Chinese yellow stared back at her—a mockery of its life of a half-hour ago; against the ghastly pallor of the cheeks, the lips parted garish red, the eyes blazed garish green, the hair shone garish gold—a mockery. The woman in the yellow gown stared at it until the shadows through the shutters grew long; until she tottered and sank down upon her knees.

Her maid came, red-eyed, and looked at her; brought food and went away again, sobbing. But the woman in her yellow gown did not sob. Once she lifted the lid of a trunk, and gazed in and laughed—in the face of the repellent beautiful smile inside—but she did not sob. She only crouched there, by herself, and thought.

For now she had that with which to think; to judge, and to decide. She was asleep no longer, this Lilith. And when the clock on her desk struck five, she rose with a curious strength and dressed herself. It was in her usual black lace dignity that John Armistead found her; on the veranda, with her hands folded, as she had been found the night before.

"Hello, Lil—all right?" Armistead was abstracted, his forehead lined with anxiety; he did not see the mockery. "How you been? Where's Zona? Here you, Miguel, tell that nigger to get me a cold drink." He sat down in one of the American rocking chairs and began fanning himself, and mopping the perspiration from his honest worried forehead. Why the devil didn't she ask him how his trip had come out? Not that he was in any hurry to tell—being unused to recounting failure—but why didn't she ask him? "I say, where's Zona?" He looked about for one who would ask him.

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"I do not know. I have not seen her all day. The servants said she went out—early; but after Mr. Wayne left."

"Wayne?" Armistead started up. "Has Randy been here? Where's he gone? Why didn't he wait till I got home?"

"Yes," the expressionless voice answered each question, with a careful accuracy, "he has been here. He has gone—to the East. He went before you came home because it was necessary."

"Necessary—rubbish!" Armistead got up and strode up and down the veranda angrily. "He didn't dare face me; that's why he went. He knows what I'd have said to him, what I think about his damned lotus-eating—how he had the nerve to show his face down here's more'n I can see! Coming home and getting fussed over and booming that Bureau way up into G—, working himself and everybody else into a perfect stew of belief in himself—and then throwing it all up, chucking it, sneaking back to his infernal yellow faces—to his cushions! to his laziness!" The words exploded one after the other; this triumph of inactivity could not have attacked the man of action at a worse hour. He was conquered, frustrated in the pet scheme of his whole business life—his whole life, simply, let us say—he had come home sore at heart, and had not even been asked how he had fared; and now, to hear that this loafer, this dilettante had succeeded, had fooled them all and gone back, victorious in his one ambition—to stand still. "And he had the cheek, the brass nerve to come here to my house!"

The woman he had married rose and walked over to him, till she towered above him like an avenging destiny. "He came here to my house," she declared. "It was to the house of my mother and my grandfather

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that he came. It is his house." And the green eyes shone at Armistead like a springing panther's.

"What—what d'ye mean?" he stammered, stepping back. "Y're so all-fired queer these days, Lil—what d'ye mean?"

"I am queer, you say?" Still she stood there looking down on him, her arms hanging straight at her sides, her whole body taut—scarcely breathing. Endurance had tightened, tightened—to the point of the unbearable; only a moment or two and it would snap—to torture some one. "I am queer—and what of you? You are as usual, no?—only more as usual. You go off like a bear, sullen and muttering—you will take me away, you have had enough of this swampy Dago city, this city of *my* ancestors! You are sick of it, you are sure that I am sick because of it, or will be—You, you, you! I ask you, Juan Armistead (the Spanish name came naturally as her resentment mounted), did you ever think what *I* might prefer to do? Did you ever consider me as a soul with desires apart from yours, as a creature who might differ from your wish in any one respect? No, you did not. I have been yours as your money is yours, to gloat over and point out to other men; aside from my being something of yours, have you ever taken me into account—have you ever observed me, even? *Dios*! you do not know that I exist. You do not know that I exist. And now you come back raging like a mad *toro*—for what? Because another, some one else, has dared to hold an idea other than yours! Because a man, a man as free as you, because this man—your friend—has followed *his* desire and so gone against yours for him! You demand what right he had to come within your house—with an audacity that takes the breath, you assail him for having brought an opinion different from yours within

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the walls that you have paid for. But what of yourself when you were in his house—when for weeks and months you accepted his bounty, and that of his family—did you then conform even outwardly to his beliefs? Did you pretend for the sake of graciousness to hold one fancy similar to his? No. You went into his house and told him what you thought, insisted that he believe as you believed, you insulted him by rising at a dinner where you went as his guest and declaring that he was to act as you had decided that he should act; and he—he rose to the heights of courtesy, and allowed it you. With all that you did against him, he never denounced you; he spoke of you to his friends as one would speak of a king—of one whom one honours and reveres, one who can do no wrong. He veritably conferred upon you the divine right, Juan Armistead—and you, now you are repaying him!" It was all she had refrained from saying, all she had kept repressed behind those smoke-veiled, threatening eyes, that now came to him in full—the first speech of over three sentences that she had ever made him in her life.

The short square man whom she arraigned seemed cowed, collapsed—bereft of all his blustering aggression. "Don't see what you're goin' on like that about it for," he muttered, dodging her eyes. "If I was unfair to him, I'm sorry. Can't always have on my company manners, y' know; and I came in here darn tired—darn tired. That Texas combine——" He rose heavily. Still she did not ask him, and he stopped without finishing his sentence. Perhaps it was always I, I, I, with him. What was it with her, he wondered stupidly.

"Ah, then you lost money? But I might have known. It is money alone that can really upset you. Your friend——"

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"No," he flung out, goaded by the sting of hearing some one dare to say it. "No—I didn't lose money. I didn't make any, that's all. And I am upset—but by the Lord, you don't help me to get over it any! Y're so taken up with Randy and the wrong I've done him—and you;" Armistead was just inside the window on his way upstairs, but all at once, as though by some impulse outside himself, he turned back and faced his wife, who was still standing. "But by gracious, I don't see why it's so much to you," he said resentfully, the self-confidence that never strayed very far now returning to reinforce him. "I don't see why you should raise such a rumpus over what I did to Randy." His tired warm face grew puzzled as he thought about it.

"I know you do not see," she returned, so deliberately that she reminded him of his mother (an honest Irish person) when about to punish him; and he stared at her curiously. "I know you do not see. Did I not say a moment ago that you do not know that I exist? But if you will come back and sit down, you shall hear. Yes, now is the time; you shall hear."

He would have liked to have waited for the story—it seemed that it was to be a story—until after he had gone up and had a bath, after his hot day, and dressed; but there was something in her manner that warned him not to put her off. He took the chair opposite her with the obedience of a child for its monitor. And while she talked he looked at her, trying to recognize in this strange burning spirit of the vivid gleaming eyes and hair, that dreamy, languorous human he had married. But he could not. He had never been married to this woman, he heard her speak for the first time, watched her as a stranger, telling him that of which he was ignorant. Half of the time he could not

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even understand her speech; yet she spoke slowly and distinctly—like his mother when she had been going to punish him.

"When first you saw me, Juan Armistead, I was a thing. I lived and breathed and ate and slept; but I tell you I was a thing. Since my mother had died, I had not spoken with a creature; my lips had moved and made sounds, but I had not spoken. There was no one with whom to speak, and so I forgot. When you met me, I had forgotten altogether. I was a thing, beautiful, amiable, but discontented—seeking greater comfort. Others had offered some, but not enough. I waited, and wisely; for you came. What you had was enough, so I took it; and in exchange I became your wife—say rather always your thing, for you thought of me as such. I was as such. It was a good bargain"—for an instant the long lids dropped over their green, wearily—"both of us like you say 'made good,' no? Eight years we lived like that, you and I, both satisfied. I had my *luxe*, you yours—since you had me. And then you took me on a journey; I did not want so much to go—I should have liked to stop at home in my ease, where I had most comfort—but you took me. There was no question about it—there has never been any question between you and me. You took me. And then—as ever when it was a matter of more money—you left me; stored me as one would his trunk, in the garret of a friend who had room and a generous heart. And once in a while you came to look at me, to be assured that I was still in good condition and well cared for; and each time you saw nothing to cause anxiety, everything was satisfactory. The trunk was undisturbed. But when you came to move me away, Juan Armistead, you did not see that you moved only the shell—the empty box—for the shell was all you

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had brought. You did not see—no," the low even voice quivered just for a second, "never, not for an instant, that during your absence something had grown up inside; something rare and beautiful, which when you took away your thing, remained. You understand me?—remained. And yet which went on, too; which had to live with you—you understand? From that time on, you began to think that I was queer; queer, because you could not understand me. I annoyed you, worried you, perplexed you with my odd desires; you could not understand me, I was no longer a thing. And so a year and a half has gone by, almost two years, and since a few months I live altogether in America; I am at last complete, I grow to be myself. Here in New Orleans where my mother knew her short, short happiness—*la pobracita!*—I have known mine; a happiness so wild, so sublimely tender, that though it was but a lightning flash long, I am ready now to die for confessing it. That happiness"—she rose and stood before him, a curious radiance enveloping her—"I owe your friend, Randal Wayne. It was he with whom you left me, he who changed me from a thing—he who brought me to myself, by his returning to America; he with whom I would have gone back to his East, had he permitted me. But something—not he, but something, some force outside of him, would not allow him to take me. 'It is not that I want to leave you,' he said to me, 'but that I must.' He would have taken me—he wanted me—but he could not. Something prevented. So I"— the radiance dominated her out of all flesh; she was pure light in her exaltation—"I will go out to him, *si*, though I never reach him, I will go out to him. I will go to-night—unless you kill me," she added simply.

The man she stood before so fearlessly, gazed at her out of eyes gone blood shot—stunned, uncom-

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prehending. "I—I'm not goin' to kill you," he stammered thickly. "G—Get out o' my sight!"

She hesitated a moment, looking at him with a great new compassion—then again that light flamed up into her eyes, and she went quickly within the house and upstairs; leaving him to stumble in after her—but to that part of the place most distant from her rooms.

In a little while she came down again, clad in the dress she had worn when before the train had carried her to Randal Wayne's house. In her face was always that exalted, dreamy light; utterly unconscious, as though something and not she were moving through her. A luggage brake drove up to receive some boxes; one small case she herself placed carefully on the top. Then, slowly, unrealizingly, she gazed for the last time on the old house that had been her mother's—and with a little sigh went out to the carriage that was waiting and got in. The carriage rolled away down the drive; Lilith sank back on the cushions in a torpor of satisfaction. Then suddenly—before they had reached the gates—she sat up. "Miguel, Miguel! The señorita—I forgot her. Is she—has she come home? Have you seen her, Miguel?"

"The señorita came home one hour before I go to fetch the señor master, señora," Miguel answered without turning, "The señorita looked bad, very bad; and tired—like she had walked many miles. She told me she did not wish the dinner, or to be disturbed."

"Ah—*la pobracita!* I should go back and speak to her—I must go back, how could I have forgotten her—I must go back! No, no"—as the man half started to turn—"it is too late. Go on. It is too late—I must go without seeing her. It is not

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that I would, but that I must!" With a curious finality she sank back against the cushions.

Miguel started to drive on.

But before they had gone ten feet, another carriage rolled inside the gate, stopped with a lurch of abruptness, as it drew up beside them.

"Lilith—Lilith!" A small form jumped out and rushed to her. "Lilith, it's me, it's Dal, come to stay with you! Did you 'spect me? Were you coming to meet me? We got Uncle Randy's message last night, an' we hurried faster'n anything. Jonas was scan'lous slow getting ready, but here we are—that is, here I am. Jonas is coming later with my things—I left him at the station, 'cause I couldn't wait, an'"—the eager voice panted—quite out of breath—"oh, Lilith, isn't it *beau*-tiful I've come?"

Still she had not spoken. Holding him there, in a close, throttling embrace, she looked from him to Miguel—helplessly. If only we could take the child! she had said. And Randy had echoed her desire. "If only we could!"

And now the child was here; had come to her—just in time. It was not by chance that he had come just then; not by chance, she knew. Something had made him come. If he had waited for Jonas—but Something had made him.

She caught him closer to her. His mother—but had not his mother said, "Really he is more your child than mine?"

Lilith hesitated no longer. "*Si, si*, my dear one—it is beautiful that you have come, yes! It is beautiful, for now we shall all three be together. You see, my little child"—she took his face between her hands—"we are going to Hong-kong, to be with Uncle Randy. Uncle Randy has gone on—he wanted to take us,

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he would have taken us—but he could not. Something prevented him. So now we must go out to him, you and I. You will like that, no? You will love to be always with us—with him and with me—our most wonderful?" Desperately she waited for his answer.

Dal's eyes were like stars. His voice tripped over itself in his delight. "To go to Hong-kong—with you and Uncle Randy?—to be with you all the time and with that boy with the red-buttoned cap? Never to have to go with Jonas any more? Oh Lilith!" He threw his arms around her in a madness of contentment. "It's the most *beau*-tiful plan any one ever thought of," he sighed. "If only it'll come true!"

"It shall come true"—Lilith leaned forward, touched Miguel imperiously. "Drive to the station quickly, very fast; we are late. It shall come true, my beloved one," she turned to the child with a superb assurance. "The beautiful plan shall come true!" And the two radiant faces gazed at each other rapturously, as they were whirled swiftly towards the starting point—and the beautiful plan closed up.

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CHAPTER XI

THE ship that was so slow, so slow, lagged yet three days out of Yokohama; wakened by its very motionless quiet, Lilith had slipped into her Chinese coat, and was now at the door of her cabin, looking out on to the deserted deck. There was no throb of engines, no creak-creak of machinery; no sound at all. The boat had stopped.

"The wretchedness of it! When we have been so long—when we had to wait a whole week for another steamer, so that now we are ten days behind Randy—the wretchedness of it not to hurry—to stop!" With a little movement of irritation, she pushed open the door and stepped out.

"Why are you standing out there, Lilith?" Dal called to her sleepily. "Is it morning? What makes everything so still? I'm coming out too, Lilith; see, here I am." He slipped his hand into hers as he joined her on the empty deck.

"Where is everybody?" he asked, his voice growing hushed as he felt the great silence that enfolded them. "Lilith! we're all alone—everybody is out of the ship. Shan't we go too?"

But Lilith did not hear him. Her eyes were fixed—fascinated—by a leaping tongue of flame that was darting up the hatchway; for once she was oblivious of Dal.

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He shivered a little in the chill night air; drew nearer. Quite far off he thought he saw some little boats; but it was hard to see through the dense darkness, hard to see anything but the lovely leaping flame that now was fascinating him also. "It's fire," he said reverently, his childish face radiant with the reflection of it. "Isn't it *beau*-tiful, Lilith?"

Lilith gathered him to her and held him tightly. The beautiful flame was growing brighter; with the child in her arms she knelt down and watched it, growing brighter and brighter—and coming nearer. Then she brought out the God of To-morrow and stood him up where he could see it too. Flame—flame—it was her essence, her origin, coming to claim her; she knelt there before it in her glowing orange robe, holding the child's hand, while the glory of her hair gleamed round them both. He looked at her awed, unafraid; for he trusted her absolutely, as himself. And he too loved the fire, loved seeing her in it—through his narrowed attentive eyes.

She was smiling; it was a dream she saw—a dream, the only real thing. As at Christmas, before *he* came, she had used to sit before the fire with the child and see his face in its blaze, now she knelt before this fire the same way; the dream was his face. It was strange, she could see so distinctly—the beautiful impassive features, the narrowed gray eyes, whose grave serenity the wonderful flame crept nearer to illumine—ah yes, the eyes!—looking at her, was it hesitatingly?—from the doorway of an Eastern house. An Eastern house it was; yet as he was about to vanish into it, he turned slowly, and faced the West again. An odd weary smile came over his lips—the smile of one who is old, old—who knows everything thoroughly. But while she watched, faint

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with a sudden apprehension, the Smile she knew—the self she knew, was there beside her. In the grandeur of the now roaring flame she could see it so clearly; the child, the boy Randal, had disappeared—something had crashed—had bumped his head, poor dear one, and he had vanished. But there, where he had been, she saw that other—that self that she had made and that had made her, and it was smiling at her. "Though you do not reach me, I shall come to meet you," it said distinctly, "I shall come to meet you; I shall never fail you—Lilith!"

She rose, held out her arms; her mass of hair and the gorgeous orange robe made one with the exultant light that whirled about them; the Smile that had entered in the place of the boy Randal went out to her adoringly, everlastingly—in the body of real youth, it was the only immortal. And with the suffocation of its sweetness, she sank down ecstatic—at the feet of the exquisite God of To-morrow.

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CHAPTER XII

IT was a peculiarly sultry night in Hong-kong; from the Peak, which was shrouded in its eternal yellow scarf, the heat seemed to hang in humid ribbons, dripping at their ragged ends into the gardens and bamboo lattices of the houses of the town; leaves and petals and the stems of things stuck together in a huddled torrid darkness that beat upon the eyes and thickened the sense of smell and even stormed the lips in a paradox of perception until one would have sworn that one tasted the damp, smoking ether. All oxygen seemed to have eaten itself up, in one last, gasping struggle for life, and its suffocation was succeeded by a gorged stillness—much the same as that grotesque hush about the place of a Parsee burying-tower, when all that has been force and life and energy is being consumed and laid waste—and denied ever to have had existence. There was not even a moon to pretend to generate the thick dampness which beauty might have excused—to a bearable degree at least; it was all black, black, black, like heavy leaded paint dashed by a brutally defacing hand across the jewels of the harbour and the hazy draperies of the terraced city. And the blackness and the quiet, and the heavy, hanging heat gathered itself up into an exaggeration of density and then dropped—into the high white veranda of the Consulate.

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Wayne lay full length upon his cushionless bamboo chair, listening to the scratch-scratch of Len's incessant quill, and occasionally beating a gentle tattoo on the bony little head of Wrinkles sprawled in wide diffusion at his side.

"It's the sort of a night you believe in hell," he murmured absently. "The sort of a night you feel cheated because there are none of hell's compensations—at least none near enough. Wan Ho! Let that cursed punkah rest, and get me some soda." It was too much of an effort even to talk pidgin English to-night, but Wayne's voice—the old self's voice—was as indolently free from irritation as ever.

Wan Ho brought the soda-siphon noiselessly, moved a table within easy reach, and placed whisky and an ash tray upon it—with the mechanical thoughtfulness of long habit. Then he went back to the punkah.

"A month, it says, since I came back—that curious lie they call a calendar: a month! The thing is, did I ever go away? Was not the real self always here, watching the soda fizz to its eternally same height—lighting the everlasting cigarette—while some odd resembling phantom of me wandered out to that America; toiled, accomplished, loved!" The fine, worn face seemed deepened in its weary lines; the long hand fell almost lifeless, from its loose hold on the siphon. "But if that were so," he went on drearily, "how is it I remember—remember so distinctly, so ineradicably; remember now more clearly than I recognize? How is it—except that through remembrance one gropes always for connexion with reality; for everything is true but the present. The past—the future—the eternal!—all are the same; only the present lies, only the present. Then, if that is so, the real self—all there is of me at all—has gone

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out; is freed, uncrippled any longer, to be with them —the two! And the phantom is this weariness that stays, yes, that is it—this weariness that stays." The narrowed eyes shut altogether, and in the all-possessing heat the man lay motionless.

It was thus he could remember best, that he could look beyond the Door and see within a gloriously lovely woman—bending above a grave-eyed graceful child; it was thus—to the ceaseless scratch-scratch of those notes that were forever being pushed through—that he could best project himself inside and lose himself: the old, the new, the real; himself—that always had been, always would be, that as she had said was one with them, and so never could be separated from them. When the sublimity of that realization came to him, the face of Randal Wayne was indeed a phantom face—a transparency merely, for that spirit which glowed through and dominated it, triumphant. The destiny that had been hung about his neck no longer weighted him—he could not feel it; the knowledge that had sucked life dry of its surprises no longer defrauded him—he had forgotten it; the gray, gray philosophy of the hands inexorable—behind, pushing; before, pulling—no longer intruded its arid promises upon him. He was beyond it. What was the hot embrace of temperature—the feeble punkah-flap—the faint scratch-scratch?—what but the ghostly vain endeavours of a shadow-world trying ineffectually to declare itself. Less and less audibly they came to him, these futile rebellious murmurs of the sphere he was forgetting; less and less significantly, as the torrid evening lengthened, were its sounds and sights and heavy odours borne to him—who was without their pale. But more and more clearly, more and more rapturously came the vision of that other world

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—that only world—where always the woman with her gleaming hair moved in a radiance of light, and with the child.

He saw her always in pale opalescent robes, in whose folds leapt flame; in whose gorgeousness dwelt the ethereal. He saw her tall, superb—a goddess; and then stooping, divinely self-obliterating, before the child. He saw her dignified, and then adorably smiling—a child herself, as somehow she had always been; he saw her passionately angry—and then he saw her ingenuously gay. But never now did he see her dormant: now was she the embodiment of life—the life to which he had awakened her. And in all life's moods—not merely the ideal, but *all*—he saw her, and in all of her exulted. While not the least of his tender pleasure came in seeing her once more at the feet of that sweet sad-faced ghost, "my mother," whose eyes and lips again became expressive, now that she had one with whom to speak.

So now it was she who was awakening—her mother, the child, himself! It was she who had become the great inspiration—Lilith—Lilith—Lilith!

Sharply, agonizingly, the joy was wrenched from him. In the false world some one touched his arm—spoke to him softly; and at Wan Ho's instigation, he opened his eyes—to meet the eyes of John Armistead.

"Jack!" Incredulously he half rose.

"I guess it's not 'Jack' any longer." Armistead laughed shortly, unpleasantly. "I guess it's just John Armistead. And you, for the little while you have left, are Randal Wayne. It's true we used to be room-mates, chums, though I was a good eight years your senior; but it seems, Randal Wayne, that we never were friends. It seems"—as he looked at

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him, Armistead's staring eyes grew blood-shot—"that the word friend was just a damned lie between us, to cover up"—he laughed again, recklessly—"almost any old thing." For a moment longer he gazed contemptuously at Randal, who had risen; then he drew a revolver from his pocket and laid it on the table between them.

"I've come back to kill you, Wayne," he said, with a curious quiet dignity. "I've come back to tell you what I think of you, and then—to kill you. Have y' anything to say?"

Randal Wayne regarded him without flinching. "What have *you* to say?" he asked gently.

"What have I to say?" The blood poured into Armistead's face until it was swollen livid with his hate. "You can stand there and face me, without losing your reason, and ask me what I have to say? By God, I wonder the Almighty Himself don't strike you dead for the insolence of it—and save me from soilin' my hands with you! Here, in the place where I trusted her to you, where I left her as innocently as if she'd been a child; here, while"—his voice almost sobbed with rage—"she lies buried, burned alive, dead at the bottom of the sea, killed on her way to you—you can stand up and ask me, without winkin' an eye-lash, what I have to say! Curse you! Curse you!" He fell into a chair, and his head sank within his shaking hands.

"Look up at me," came the steady serene voice, undisturbed. "You are wrong; she is not dead. Lilith is not dead."

"Wrong? Not dead?" Like a bull pricked again after he has fallen, Armistead rose, blindly, the red flaming in his eye. "Didn't the people who escaped—who let her die, curse 'em!—who went off

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in their life-boats and saw her die—didn't they confess it? D'ye think a crowd of cowards like that 'ud own up to a murder—for that's all it was, I tell you, murder—unless it was so true that it haunted 'em day and night? Isn't the captain of that ship in a sanatorium, almost crazy, because he left the blazin' old tub, while Lil and the boy were on it, forgotten? By the Lord, I sh'd think you'd invent some better excuse than that she's not dead!"

"She is not dead," repeated the calm voice assuringly. "I tell you, Lilith lives—breathes, moves, more potently than she ever has in all her previous existence."

"Oh! you're gettin' off some o' this spiritual nonsense," Armistead sneered; "reincarnation, I suppose, and all that. Well, it may be a comfort to you—with your double-faced, easy-going convictions; but I tell you, it ain't to me! To know she was alive, *I'd* have to see her—and I reckon with all your power over her, Randal Wayne, you couldn't bring her back again. You couldn't show her to me!"

"No," Wayne looked at him pityingly; "I could not show her to you. You would not see her. You never saw her, Armistead—did you?"

"Oh yes, I saw her, all right enough," returned Armistead grimly. "When she was a girl, shut off alone up there on a New Hampshire farm, I saw her; and I took her away and married her—gave her what she wanted, every single thing she wanted, from the time I first set eyes on her. I tell you"—his thick voice broke harshly—"I worshipped her. I may not have had the high-falutin' notions about her that you did—men who get out and make their way in the world, make their way right up from the backwoods shanty, have no time for notions. It takes you

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gentlemen"—all the resentment of a great class, the middle-class, came out in his invective—"you born aristocrats, to weave fancies for a woman—and dishonour. Thank God Zona's married to a plain man! If she'd been promised to a Southern do-nothing, I'd have shot her with my own hand before I'd have let her marry him, now. But she wasn't. She's the one craft that's coming safe out of this tempest; though her heart's about broken in two. But Maddox will take care of Zona. And I dare say God or Providence or somebody'll take care of that poor stricken mother—your sister! They say she hasn't spoken a word since she heard the news—except to say she'd always anticipated something of the sort—the boy was so like you! Yes," he was panting and exhausted with his furiously racing speech, "somebody'll look after them—the women who are left; but what you and I have to settle is about the one who's gone. And by the eternal," his heavy hand came crashing down upon the table between them, "I haven't much time. I'm in a hurry."

Randal Wayne stood before him, his arms folded, his face strangely exalted. "Very well"—his eyes rested on the pistol almost lovingly—"I am ready."

Armistead's hand went towards the weapon; then, as he caught the expression of the other's face, drew it reluctantly back. "What—what the devil 're you lookin' so glad about?" he demanded fiercely. "You—you don't want to die, do you?"

"No"—always that curious transported look out of the dreamy gray eyes—"I don't want to die. I want to live. You are sending me to live—with Lilith. With Lilith—and the child."

The pistol crashed down upon the floor of the veranda with a bang. "Then no, by God, I'm not!"

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cried Armistead. "It's all damn nonsense—I don't believe a word of it! But by all that's holy, before I'd send you to *her*—if there's the first chance of this foolishness bein' true, I"—in his excitement he was swaying back and forth—"before I'll send you to her, I'll go to her myself, I will!" And once more his shaking hand went towards the revolver; snatched at it.

But the other was too quick for him. In another instant the revolver lay far below them in the blackness of the garden. And "Sit down, Armistead," said Wayne, incisively, his face once more very weary.

Glaring at him, but stupefied by the swiftness with which he had acted, Armistead sat down. "You're always ahead of me," he uttered sullenly; "you stole from me and deceived me, you and the woman I'd lived with ten years—and now you're escaping your punishment. You've always got the best of me, damn you!—and you never did an honest stroke of work in your life!" It is thus that, even in moments of intensest passion, resentment of ideal will show itself. "It's your all-fired laziness that's always riled me!" Armistead confessed.

"Listen"—the man who had been his friend leaned forward and placed a slender, almost transparent hand on his arm—"I want you to keep quite silent until I have finished. Then, if you like, you can complete what you came for; there are other pistols.

"You say that I have stolen from you. What? No—do not interrupt me; I will answer it myself—what? What is and whence came this woman who by your own avowal belongs to me? You do not know; you confess you cannot even see her. Yet I see her, for I created her. The Lilith who is mine is no one else's; for until I woke her and then made her,

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she did not exist. You never married her; for she did not exist. I want you to answer me something: before she went away—after I had been there and left—did she talk to you at all?"

"Yes." The word came like a rumble of menacing thunder.

"Ah! And as she talked with you then,"—the eyes that had known her to the last quiver narrowed upon him, commanding truth—"as she talked with you of herself, of me perhaps, and you, was she the woman you had married? Did you understand her—know what she was talking about?"

Armistead flung himself out of his chair. "What the devil has all this got to do with it?" he stammered, evading Wayne's eyes; "she was queer, of course. She was always queer, after I'd left her here in Hongkong with you."

"Was she the woman you had married?" persisted the steady voice and eyes—"as she talked with you did you know her? Was she your wife?"

For a moment longer the worn-out American met the fire of those inexorable eyes. Then his honest thick-set head went down upon his hands, as he sank into his chair again. "No, she wasn't," he confessed; and his square bowed shoulders shook with his sobs.

The look that came into Lilith's face when she gazed at the child, came now into Randal Wayne's as he crossed to his friend. "Jack," he said quietly, "we have both had to give up a good deal; each of us—as individually we measure values—has had to renounce the greatest thing. But isn't it something to have had that whose loss stabs at us?" He was speaking as simply and directly as he could, compassionately omitting his own sublime compensation

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in the life on the other side of the Door. "Would you have felt this as you do, if you had not had those ten years'—or almost ten years'—satisfaction with Lilith? And don't you remember telling me, here on this veranda one evening, what a wonderful wife she had been—how different she was from other women?"

"She was different." Armistead's head was still upon his arms. "All the time we were married, until—until I brought her home from here, she was as sweet and nice as she could be. And pretty—why, Lil was the prettiest thing I ever saw—the——"

"She is." Wayne insisted on the tense of immortality. "The loveliest and most perfect. And listen, Jack"—his hand was on the bowed shoulder, his smile in its tenderness wonderful—"it was you and I together who made her so. If you had not discovered her, and taken her away out of that dreary farm into luxury and beauty and thoughtfulness—affection—she would have lived and died undeveloped; meaningless. You started her on her evolution; you fed her soul with the beauty she craved then; and I—completed what you had begun. It is together we made this woman, gave her back greater than she was sent; and is it not together we must bear the loss of her?"

There was an instant of deep silence. Then Armistead raised his face, dazed in its haggardness. "I s'pose you know what you're talkin' about," he said drearily; "anyway, y' don't seem to me the all-fired scoundrel I thought you were when I started out here. Guess I must be going along"—he rose awkwardly—"guess to-morrow 'll see me sailin' back to the States and gettin' down to business." He picked up his hat, and sighed—as though he was very tired.

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"It will be the best thing," Wayne agreed thoughtfully. "You will go to Nevada?"

"No—no, not right away. Zona and Maddox want me to live with them for a while. You see"—he twirled his hat about, embarrassed, "they don't know I'm out here. They think I'm in Alaska, coming home next week. Well, Randy"—he laughed a little, nervously, "I'll say good-bye then. I—I dare say you think I'm a weak sort of fool—lettin' you talk me out of what I came for; but if—what was that you said about our makin' her together?" He drew his hand across his dull, tired eyes. "I guess if that's so—if you're willing to share with me, I ought to be willing to share with you. Though by the Lord it comes hard"—he burst forth again. "I thought Lil was mine absolutely. It comes hard."

"I know it does, Jack"—about the other man's mouth sharp little lines were gathering—"I know. Good-bye."

Hesitatingly Armistead accepted the hand held out to him. Then something in the so transparent face assured him that he was not making a fool of himself by withdrawing; that he was quite as much a man, in the eyes of other men, as he had ever been. And he gripped Wayne's hand harder. "Somethin' in you's always got the best of me," he repeated. "Good-bye."

And again Wayne was alone.

Out of the garden the heat rose thicker and more humid; stretched once more to the full length of his chair, the man lay motionless, and listened. Somewhere there were voices, singing—at the Sailors' Mission probably—led by the peculiar chanting voice of the English chaplain's wife. For some time the man in the chair listened—evidently grateful for any

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diversion whatsoever; then the voices stopped. "As it was they were late," he murmured mechanically; "they generally stop at nine."

As he lay there, thinking vaguely of nothing, a quiet footstep came round the corner of the porch.

"Ah—you!" As he rose, he noticed that the great dark eyes that came to him through the darkness were dilated.

"You are all right?" asked Caro, with a little gasp. "You do not know—as we sat there singing, I had the most curious presentiment about you—a dreadful sense of calamity. I could hardly wait to leave the Mission and hurry up here. Rollo's with me—just outside; but—you're all right? Nothing has hurt you?"

He looked at her as he had looked at her that day when he had kissed her—the same rare appreciation of a rare relation lighting up his face. "You are the best friend in the world," he said, taking both her hands, "and the most sensitive. Nothing has hurt me, no; except in the same monotonous way—the negative. For a moment to-night I thought I was to be at last released—to what, you know; but it seems that I was not. It seems that I must still stay here—this absurd, shadowy bit of me."

"To me it is a very wonderful bit," said his friend simply; "I glory in that part of you that is with her—and yet—the East is more the East, and so I am more satisfied, when you are here too. You remember the night in the temple, Randal?"

"I remember."

"'My mother never saw such beauty' she said—she felt her ancestors so keenly, so significantly, like one of us. And when I look back over it all, I so often repeat that phrase—'my mother never saw

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such beauty'—as I, the English chaplain's wife, have seen in the working out and completing of your two destinies. To have been the only one to know from the beginning all that was to come to you and that did come—it has meant a great deal. You will think of that, Randal?"

"I will think of that," promised Randal raising her hand to his forehead, after the manner of the natives.

She left him—her noiseless step retreating imperceptibly down through the garden to the dusty road. And as the night wrapped itself up in hotter, blacker draperies, and went to sleep, Wayne slept too; while Wan Ho still pulled at the punkah, and round the corner of the veranda a pen scratched faintly, setting down prayers to those gods of the past; and it may have been—who knows?—to the God of To-morrow.

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AUTUMN ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The English Court in Exile: James II. at St. Germain.

By MARION and EDWIN SHARPE GREW, Authors of "The Court of William III." With 16 Illustrations. 15s. net.

The Court in Exile was the Court of James II., after his flight from England on the arrival of William of Nassau, Prince of Orange. "The Court of William III.," by the same authors, described the advent of the Prince of Orange. In the present volume the fortunes of the exiled King and his Italian wife are followed through the subsequent years which he spent in France, whilst fruitlessly endeavouring to regain his throne. James and his consort were received in France by Louis XIV.

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with magnificent hospitality. The Roi Soleil placed at their disposal the ancient and magnificent Château of St. Germain-en-Laye, which looks across the Seine to distant Paris, and fitted up their refuge with lavish and sympathetic hospitality, even to the appointment of a nursery for their children and the provision of a purse of money—placed on the Queen's dressing-table—for her immediate expenses. Here, during the remaining years of his life, James II. and his family were the guests of the French King, whose generosity and fine courtesy to his pensioners never failed. The life of the last Stuarts at St. Germain is described in the present volume—from the Queen's letters, the King's memoirs, and from records left in manuscript or diary by a number of contemporary writers—and the result is a curious picture, not merely of the usages of the French Court, but of their application in matters of etiquette to another royal Court planted, as it were, in the French Court's midst.

The little Court of St. Germain was a melancholy thing, notwithstanding its share in all the splendid gaieties of Versailles. All James's attempts to regain his kingdom were unsuccessful. The chief of these attempts, the journey to Ireland, the campaign there, and the Court at Dublin, are described. A motley crowd of adventurers, as well as loyal and devoted adherents, flocked to St. Germain, and many of them, the most gallant and devoted, were Irishmen. The records and characteristics of these, drawn from contemporary sources, are one of the features of the book.

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W. G. Grace of the stage, as astonishing in vitality, and in the long retention of rare gifts." The list of famous people, on and off the stage, whom she has met during her long career is a very extensive one, and of all of them Mrs. Calvert has many intimate and interesting things to tell. For over ten years—during the 'sixties and 'seventies—her husband, Mr. Charles Calvert, was the centre of dramatic life in Manchester, when during his management the Prince's Theatre attained to so high a level of excellence and artistic reputation. It was here that Mrs. Calvert came into contact with Phelps, J. L. Toole, E. A. Sothern, Tom Taylor, Henry Irving, and many others whose names are famous in the history of the stage. Since those days she has played many parts both in England and America, and her fifteen years' work on the London stage is well known, her most recent appearance being in Sir Herbert Tree's sumptuous production of *Henry VIII.* at His Majesty's Theatre.

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responsible for her early musical education; later she studied for a year with Duprez in Paris, but Lamperti, "the very first master in the world," is the teacher to whom may be ascribed the credit of having launched the young diva on the road to fame. Her debut was made at Messina in 1870, and her first appearance in London was at Covent Garden in 1872, when she scored an instantaneous success. In spite of a very strenuous life of work and study, Madame Albani has found time to make a host of friends, amongst whom was the late Queen Victoria, who retained a warm personal affection for the great singer, and from whom Madame Albani received many autographed letters, some of which are reproduced in these pages. The number of famous musicians with whom she has come in contact is a very large one; personal mementoes and autographs of such men as Rubinstein, Sarasate, Paderewski, Elgar, and others form an interesting feature of the book, which, besides being an earnest and sincere account of a great career, contains many amusing and intimate anecdotes of well-known people that make it very pleasant reading.

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